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My Chicano Education:
The Importance of Edgewalkers to the Field of Art Education.

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My Chicano Education:
The Importance of Edgewalkers to the Field of Art Education

by

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Thesis

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Dedication

For the edgewalkers of the third landscape: you make the world go ‘round.

“I am your art.”

Acknowledgements

It takes a village to write a thesis...

It certainly took my whole community to complete master's degree over the past three years. I would like to thank my family for always allowing me to find my own path and never questioning their perpetual student. I am very grateful for my wonderful friends who cheered me on from the beginning—from helping me write my statement of purpose on restaurant napkins, to listening to me as I developed my ideas, and for sticking around even when I was locked away writing. I am blessed to have my co-workers at Caritas of Austin who supported me unconditionally me over that last three years with a flexible schedule and a willingness to learn about my "third landscape" filled with conjunto tardeadas at the White Horse, Pachanga Festivals and the like.

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I could not have completed this work without my community's love and understanding and their continuous cheering from the sidelines. I want to thank each one of you for enabling me to understand the power of art and shared experience through the process of transculturation.

Abstract

My Chicano Education:
The Importance of Edgewalkers to the Field of Art Education

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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This thesis uses autoethnographic research of the Mexican American art community in Austin, Texas to demonstrate how edgewalkers, people to move between multiple cultural worlds yet retain their own identity, become informal art educators through the process of transculturation. The work describes this cyclical and on-going process that includes curiosity, knowledge gathering, and awareness of self and others and the summation of these elements, which leads to transculturation. For this research, four informal art educators practicing in Austin were interviewed. Each of the collaborators practices art in different media including visual art, curating of exhibitions, performance, and graphic design. The descriptions and analysis of the researcher's experiences along with those of the informal art educators reveal a third landscape, or an alternative space and identity, where multiple cultural worlds overlap into bicultural, bilingual and/or biconceptual environments. This thesis demonstrates how informal art

education, made possible through transcultural experiences, is an effective tool in art education and culturally responsive instruction.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

INTRODUCTION

On the border…

I was born on the other side of the river, across the border. My dad worked with his hands, building giant metal boxes for even bigger powerhouses. My mom stayed at home with us kids in our small tin home. As I grew, I realized that my simple life set me apart from my peers.

Neither my parents nor their siblings ever had the chance to go to college—they were sons and daughters of farmers, salesmen, and factory workers. But my mom made sure to take us to the bookmobile; the traveling library on wheels, and that we never missed a day of school, from kindergarten through high school. Dad instilled a strong work ethic, the physicality and effort visible in his coal stained hands, weary body, and long hours. With the dreams from my books and the can-do attitude from my laboring family I followed my brother to university, the first generation in our family to do so.

My border was the dividing line of Ohio and West Virginia in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. But my story could be anyone's story. Here is the tale of how I came to understand and to value shared experience through curiosity, art, and friendship.

My Chicano Education

We know that which keeps people apart. We see it on the news every night. Religion, culture, brown skin/white skin, rich/poor… With this thesis, I wanted to study that which brings us together—the art of transculturation or the "shifting or circulating pattern of cultural transference" (Taylor, 1991, p. 93).

Once such transference took place between my friend Paul del Bosque and myself. We started a film series where we shared our favorite movies. Paul, knowing my interests in Mexican American culture, presented me what he deemed the "Chicano classics." I jokingly referred to our series as my "Chicano Education," as Paul would

include a valuable education session at the beginning and end of every movie covering the director's intentions as well as aesthetic, historical, and social implications of the film.

The series was one avenue in my quest for interest into Mexican American Culture. My free time was filled with Conjunto dancing, volunteering at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, and attending various Chicano cultural events. My forays were so frequent they soon became ingrained in my daily life. From living in my neighborhood, to my fluency in Spanish, to my friends and food, I adapted many of the habits and interests typically associated with Mexican Americans. I did not lose my own culture but rather I added on new elements much like learning a new language in that the two co-exist and at times intermingle. Diana Taylor (1991) acknowledges this "co-existence of elements" (p. 92) but also notes a loss of each of the original systems for the creation of a new one.

My innate curiosity and openness made it easy to flow/participate and co-exist in multiple cultures. I made friends within the Mexican American community and, like my movie series with Paul, I learned from them. Made of many musicians, visual, and performing artists, I learned from their art forms at the same time I learned from their stories and experiences. My friends were my most effective teachers. Through their art and our conversations I learned about their culture and how they navigated their complex identities and what Dr. Nina Boyd Krebs (1999) classifies as "edgewalking," or maintaining a personal identity of their primary culture while traversing into mainstream culture (p. 9). I learned not only of their journey but also of my own, generating an

awareness that enables me to connect with others. This work aims to explain this process that started with curiosity, led to knowledge, followed by awareness, and finally transculturation.

La Research Question

This work aims to give credence to the informal art education that we receive from our communities, as I have from my friends. In particular focus are the factors that enable edgewalkers to become art educators through their public expression of innovative, multiethnic visual, and performing arts. My central question is: how can individuals become informal art educators through visual and performing arts and other arts-related activities? Further, how may various forms of informal education through transcultural art experiences be effective tools in art education?

To answer these questions I use authoethnography to investigate my own education through a group of Mexican American artists creating in Austin, Texas, investigating how they became art educators for me and who were the informal art educators that influenced them as well. I use the process of transculturation outlined above to support the importance of edgewalking for helping to shape informal education.

Motivations for Research

I spent the last seven and a half years living, playing, and working in Austin, Texas. During this time I immersed myself in the Mexican American arts community. I am in awe of what I have learned not only about the artists and their creations, but also

about Chicano culture and about myself. Thus, my motivations for this current work are threefold: (a) to add to the academic research on Chicano Studies, (b) generate discussion about informal community based art education, and (c) cultivate individual and community awareness concerning the value of shared experience.

Lo Professional

Professionally, the desire to research and archive culture through my thesis is motivated by a void that exists in the study and documentation of the Mexican American experience. From elementary schools to university classrooms, subjects such as Mexican American history and culture perish from neglect; sadly, they are frequently absent all together from the curriculum in what George Lipsitz (2006) says is part of the "systemic miseducation" (p. 49) of students in the United States. With this institutional ignorance it is easy for the rest of American society to ignore or downplay issues affecting the Mexican community.

Further, there is little comprehensive research on Mexican American artists working in Austin, and even less information concerning their contributions to art education. This study sheds light on these artists in order to support and introduce its readers to the art education happening all around us. The following chapters identify ways the artists in this study informally engage their audiences in dialogue and create environments to express themselves.

In Kathleen Stewart's (1996) ethnography about her time researching in West Virginia, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America*, she

attempts to find a "space" for the experiences of her collaborators in the academy in the United States. She aims to:

> Insert the storied sensibility of a culture as a "truth" that is performed and imagined in precise practices of retelling. Culture in this account is a space of imagination, critique, and desire produced in and through mediating forms. It is not something that can be set "straight" but it has to be tracked through its moves and versions, its sites of encounter and engagement, its pride and regrets, its permeabilities and vulnerabilities, its nervous shifts from one thing to another, its moments of self-procession and dispersal. (p. 9)

My thesis aims to provide an alternative "site of encounter" so that readers may have access to a new set of voices and perspectives through my words and that of my informants. It also works to bridge the gap between informal (communal) and formal (academic) forms of education.

Acknowledging Informal Art Education

In addition to Chicano Studies, this study adds to our archive, and expands our idea, of what should be considered part of the field of art education. In this instance, I work to validate informal art communities that include artist's public work as an educational experience that supports and plays a critical role in culturally responsive teaching and is as important as academic or formal learning. Culturally responsive teaching is a form of education that is "informed by and responsive to students' cultural experiences. These experiences are viewed as assets that give guidance to the creation of transformative curriculum design" (Ballengee Morris, Ambush, & Daniel, 2012, p. 4).

In the December issue of *Art Education*, a bi-monthly journal of the National Art Education Association, the editorial pointed to the absence of multiethnic voices to the

field of art education and has thus changed the way that curriculum is developed. The editors go on to claim, "These omissions signal the need for a closer, deeper, and more refined design for art teacher preparation in the 21st century" (Ballengee Morris, Ambush, & Daniel, 2012, p. 5). *My Chicano Education* shows that these "multiethnic" voices can easily be heard through informal art education experiences such as those produced by my collaborators' work and viewers interactions with the same. By including public art in the dialogue we can help to make art education relevant and effective to all our students. This form of teaching encourages "multiple voices" to be part of the educational dialogue (Boyd Acuff, Hirak, & Nangah, 2012, p. 7). As a "transformative" and "emancipatory" experience, students of culturally responsive teaching also learn of other cultures as well as their own (Martinez, 2012, p. 13).

Para Mi

My personal motives are to validate the importance of shared experience and transculturation. Much like Nina Boyd Krebs' (1999) statement on the subject of edgewalking, understanding our own experiences connecting with others is an important task not only in academia but also in the world at large:

> What does qualify me to tackle this subject is my conviction that finding the common denominator in human relations, ferreting out the nugget—that place where any one of us can connect with anyone else—is the necessary project in the world today. (Krebs, 1999, p. xi)

My Chicano education transformed the way I see myself and others and I believe that the skill of connecting humans is integrally important to a holistic, effective, education and the human experience.

Being an edgewalker, I understand how an informal education is transformative. My connections to a culture seemingly distinct from my own motivated me to tell my story and to help others erase the imagined borders between themselves and "others." By putting awareness into words I use my experience and narrative to encourage and promote cultural understanding (Chang, 2008). I hope that my work encourages teachers to consider more culturally responsive teaching, not only in the classroom but in our communities as well.

I am aware of how my experience can benefit others through my research, art, and day-to-day actions. I consider this work as community cultural development, or effort that "embodies a critical relationship to culture, through which participants come to awareness of their own power as culture makers, employing that power to build collective capacity, addressing issues of deep concern to themselves and their communities (Goldbard, 2006).

LA RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I am, what you might say, a cultural quandary. My cross-cultural identification between the Anglo and Mexican American communities, coupled with more than sixteen years of cultural and language studies, have made it so that one would find it difficult to adequately situate me into a stereotypical ethnic category. I am an Ohio girl who enjoys

baking pies, listening to country music, and planting a garden. However, you can also find me speaking fluent Spanish, dancing Cumbia in the kitchen, and quoting *Blood In, Blood Out*. I transcend one singular ethnic background into a transcultural identity.

Autoethnography

In order to tell such a transformative story, I needed a research methodology that would enable me to explain not only my but other's evolution through our collective experiences. I choose autoethnography to describe my journey of awareness, and that of the "edgewalkers" in the following pages because it cannot only share the story but can also "transform" its readers at the same time (Chang, 2008 p. 53).

Autoethnography is comprised of auto, or self, and ethnography. Ethnography is the study and systematic recording of human cultures. And to further add to this, James Clifford notes that:

> Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of this process. (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, pp. 2-3)

As ethnography is also "part of the process," I felt that in a work so personal and intertwined with my life, I could not possibly write an objective, straightforward piece of research without including my own voice. Thus, I decided to use autoethnography to investigate this topic. Autoethnography is not a work where the author orients himself/herself at the center of the story and contributes nothing more. Rather it is about

communicating the understanding of others through one's own eyes (Chang, 2008, p. 49). Further the autoethnographer's narrative is used as a primary resource and lends a "richness" and "insights" to the writing and research process that is normally lost in the ethnographic methodology (Chang, 2008). Instead of ignoring my own experiences and feelings, I include them here in order to enhance the understanding of the reader and to incorporate multiple voices in order to establish a more holistic work.

This autoethnography hopes to temper another issue with ethnography that occurs when trying to describe cultures that are in constant flux. James Clifford suggests that ethnography can lead to "simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship (Clifford in Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 10). He goes to explain that culture is not something that is conclusive or can always be understood completely. He states that:

> Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent. Representation and explanation-both by insiders and outsiders—is implicated in this emergence. The specification of discourses I have been tracing is thus more than a matter of making carefully limited claims. It is thoroughly historicist and self-reflexive. (Clifford in Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 19)

Autoethnography can also be problematic, as the researcher may rely too much on his or her own memory and reconstruction of events as a resource (Chang, 2008, p. 55). To mitigate this, I attempt to use other data and sources to support my research such as a journal to collect data and personal reflections as I attend arts events, and study the community, photos, videos of the performances or art exhibitions, and gather any related ephemera to support the investigation.

Edgewalkers

Using a research methodology of autoethnography enabled me to take what I learned in the community and present it in an academic format. My investigation centered on the work of four Mexican American artists and art educators who are currently practicing in my community in Austin, Texas. I selected the artists for this study based on their ability to traverse various cultures with their art. These criteria were similar to those that Krebs (1999) uses to describe edgewalkers who have the following:

> 1) Comfort, if not identification, with a particular ethnic, spiritual or cultural group, 2) competence thriving in main stream culture, 3) the capacity to move between cultures in a way the individual can discuss with some clarity, 4) the ability to generalize from personal experience to that of people from other groups without being trapped in the uniqueness of a particular culture. (p.1)

My informal art education was successful because my teachers were edgewalkers. Through their art, they demonstrated their movement beyond cultures into a "third landscape" with a "border consciousness," a trait that artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña (1989) says is present in many Chicano-Latino artists in their "bicultural, bilingual and/or biconceptual" systems. He goes on to state that the ability to move between cultural worlds provides skills that other artists cannot employ. They can draw from multiple "reference codes" and epistemologies. The artists interviewed for this thesis and I share a similar blend of cultural archives that come together in a third landscape. The landscape is made up of contributing cultures, including Mexican, American, Austonian, and many more.

Las Entrevistas

I interviewed each of my "edgewalker" informants in order to investigate their personal insights on their work and to better understand their very unique identities. As Charles L. Briggs (1986) suggests, "We must look at the interview itself as a cultural encounter" (p. 10). In the chapters that follow, each of my interviews is described not only for the dialogue but also as an event itself. Briggs goes on to explain how the interviewer is a co-participant in the construction of a discourse and addresses how my understanding of the subject will alter the resulting conversation (Briggs, 1986, p. 25). Thus, it was necessary to immerse myself in Chicano culture and research in order to prepare for each of the interviews I conducted as well as to arm myself with an open-ended interview process that allowed the conversations to take on a more organic and less rehearsed direction.

To collect sufficient data for this study I interviewed four art professionals with various backgrounds and careers in the arts and who became quite influential in my Chicano education. Among my participants were Claudia Zapata, Paul Del Bosque, Roén Salinas, and Mathew Bonifacio Rodriguez. Each interview took place in Austin, Texas in my home or in the homes and studios of my collaborators who are artists and art educators currently practicing in Austin, Texas.

I conducted open-ended interviews that lasted from 1.5 to 2.5 hours, where participants engaged in a discussion about each of their personal and professional histories as well as art education experiences both formal and informal. In the appendix

is a copy of the general interview questions I asked each participant in the study. The list is not inclusive but rather a guide for the interviews, as I posed additional questions as needed. Note that these events of interviews do not encapsulate my relationship with my participants, but rather provide one focal point of formal, deliberate research. Additional information and material was gleaned from informal experiences and discussions with informants.

Each of my interviews for this thesis was, in fact, a "performative" event in itself, as described by Briggs (1986) in the following passage:

> As Austin (1962) pointed out, language does not simply provide us with a vehicle for *describing* nonlinguistic events. Speech also possesses a *performative* capacity, meaning that words are also means of *creating or transforming* a given state of affairs. The performative force of an utterance may include a transformation of the relationship between interviewer and respondent(s) or between the respondent(s) and other persons who are present. (pp. 45-46)

Each of my interviews presented me with a chance to develop a relationship with my collaborators as well as to analyze our relationship through our conversation, in addition to receiving their answers to my questions.

Informal Art Educators:

When analyzing the interviews and my experiences, I used the following guidelines for understanding the informal art education that was taking place:

Space: Is there a place for their work? Is their work public?

Connection: Is there a dialogue between the work and/or artist and the viewer? Is there a take away from the piece/experience? How is the work communicated?

Contributions: How does the work add to the collective? Was the education intentional/unintentional?

In addition to the interviews I conducted, I also kept a journal to collect data and personal reflections as I attended an abundance of arts events within the study community. At these events I took photos, videos of the performances or art exhibitions, and gathered any related ephemera to support the investigation.

LA CONCLUSION

The following pages answer questions concerning informal art education through the process of transculturation. It was important to me that the work read well both in academic circles as well as in the third landscape where many, including myself and my collaborators, reside. Thus, in order to reflect the nature of our experiences traversing multiple cultural words, this thesis incorporates a linguistic combination of English and Spanish. It also includes stories, photos, music and experience from this environment so that the reader might be exposed to an alternative, and perhaps unfamiliar, space.

The structure of *My Chicano Education* begins with a review of relevant literature, location, and terms associated with this thesis in Travels in Aztlán . Next, the reader engages in Chapter Three dedicated to my role as researcher/edgewalker. A series of vinuetes follow where I highlight the work of the participants/artists, their contributions to my informal art education as well as their own. The work concludes with a holistic view of the artist's role in informal art education and the significance of this research to the field of art education. Each of the chapters is structured like the process of

transculturation, from curious beginnings, to obtaining knowledge and experiencing awareness, to ultimately reaching a level of recognized transculturation

Chapter 2: Traveling in Aztlán

Aztlán: Legendary home of the Aztecs before they moved to found Tenochtitlan—the site of modern day Mexico City. Term reclaimed by activists in the Chicano movement to draw together members and to take back space in the United States for Mexican Americans. Exact location of Aztlán is unclear, however many claim the United States southwest as the mythical destination.

LA INTRODUCTION

> That you enjoyed this poem, pleases me muchly, because it is your poem…belongs to everyone who can relate to/identify with/ see themselves in it. Such was the intended goal. I think! To present una experiencia personal which the reader could in turn transform (y vice-versa) into a life's experience, the Chicano experience. Nay! The Universal experience!...
>
> -Raul Salinas

In writing this thesis I could have chosen a range of artists from multiple cultures to demonstrate the power of informal art education and transculturation because the message is, in a word from poet Raul Salinas, "universal." I choose to reveal my work through the Mexican American community because that is how I realized the power of art to connect people and to teach awareness of myself and of others. The beauty and complexity that draws me to the culture enables me also to share the landscape with you in detail.

The following section shadows the journey of my Chicano education including: my curiosity stage, obtaining knowledge, becoming aware, and the coming together of these elements for a transformation in the form of transculturation. This process is a new finding—being born from my autoethnographic research of contemporary informal art educators in the Mexican American art community in Austin. Thus, I have found no

comprehensive materials that speak directly to this question. However, significant supporting research played a critical role in my investigation and is outlined in the following pages. First, I explain how my curiosity led me to want to know more about the Chicano community and I provide a brief overview of the social, educational, and political challenges that Mexican Americans face in the United States. I then give samples of awareness—building this recognition through contemporary Mexican American art and the complexity of Mexican American identity. Finally, the chapter discusses how to use this process to cross borders to embody the process of transculturation.

LA CURIOSITY

It was my curiosity that first led me to the Mexican American community. The world attracted me because of the blending of two complex cultures—an intertwining of histories and cultures punctuated by a struggle to live with one foot in each world simultaneously. As chapters of this thesis reveal, I have immersed myself in Chicano culture, history, and personal relationships with members of the community. It cannot be assumed that one already is familiar with the subject of this conversation (though I hope that this writing encourages the reader to seek out more information about the culture of which I write). I created the following pages as a guide to enable readers to gain insight into the world that I have been living in for the last eight years and to the ideas and theories presented in this thesis. The work mimics the process of discovery that I encountered in the world in which I came to be aware. It in no way aims to limit this

experience to ones solely within this community, but rather to show the universality of the experience.

EL KNOWLEDGE

My curiosity led me to learn more about the Mexican American community. I must share this knowledge to explain the historical and cultural context of the collaborators of this study and their importance to my informal art education. This section provides a sample of the historical struggles that Mexican Americans have encountered and the environment where artists discussed in this work live, Austin, Texas. The section begins with a critical moment of change within contemporary Mexican American history—the Chicano Movement including the state of formal education for Chicano students in the mid-20th century. Next, the section explores Chicano identity on a localized level in Austin, Texas, to create a framework for the current space of the artists in this study.

El History Nacional

For the purpose of this study, I present some overreaching struggles of Chicanos in the 20th century. I accomplish this by focusing much of the work on the Chicano Movement, education, and identity—integral components of this investigation, so that you may secure a foundational overview of the Chicano experience.

In the second half of the 20th century, Mexican Americans began to work to alter not only the status of educational opportunities for their race, but also for social,

economic, and political change. The apex of this revolution came with the Chicano Social Movement of the 1960s and '70s that took place alongside and in conjunction with the African American Civil Rights movement. The leaders of the movement stressed that the community embrace their Mexican roots and cultural heritage and that they become politically and socially empowered (Muñoz, 2002).

The movement utilized art, school walkouts, and political demonstrations to fight for rights and equality in and out of the classroom. Historically, Mexican Americans faced discrimination in the United States, including many obstacles students faced in the realm of education (Valencia, 2008). Mexican American education struggles include segregation, lack of funding at all levels of schooling, fewer experienced teachers working in Mexican American schools, overcrowding, and poor educational facilities. One example inherent to edgewalkers, bilingual education, was optional and generally under-funded. Students were even punished for speaking Spanish at school (Valencia, 2008).

Chicano students comprised a large part of the movement and groups such as the United Mexican American Students (UMAS), the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO), and the Movimiento Estudantil Chicano de Aztlán (MECHA), organized their constituents to protest the state of education (Muñoz, 1984). Countrywide assemblies such as the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in 1969 worked to draw together various groups of Mexican American students across the United States. The conference, set in Denver, Colorado, addressed the failure of traditional schools for Mexican American students and the need for communities to have power in running

schools so that traditional culture, values, and language reflective of their ethnic background be taught in the classroom (Muñoz, 2002).

Members of the Mexican American community faced the dilemma of assimilating into "American" society or retaining their own ethnic heritage, an issue that continues in the community today. Rodolfo Corky Gonzalez, a leader of the Chicano Movement, spoke to the attendees of the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference. In regard to students who came before them, he said that they had turned away from their responsibility to the "la Raza," or their race, because they had been "Americanized by the schools, that they had been conditioned to accept the dominant values of American society, particularly individualism, at the expense of their Mexican identity. The result had been the psychological 'colonization' of Mexican American youth" (Muñoz, 2002, pp. 75-76).

The Chicano movement raised its own academic activists and out of the political movement came cultural empowerment, including studies of the ethnic group in academia. The first Mexican American Studies program in the United States began in 1968 and helped to authenticate and draw awareness to the plight of the Mexican Americans and their experiences as seen here:

> Through Chicano Studies, Chicano students intend to study and legitimize their cultural heritage…broaden and deepen university's educational and cultural mission by enlarging its academic program…serves as a socializing process…affect the student's individual consciousness and contribute to the shaping of his sense of community…provide the student with the necessary technical and educational skills to interpret his social worlds…especially that part of the world denominated "the Third World." (Muñoz, 1984, p. 9)

The end result is that students would be able to know themselves, to change their

community.

Many of the contemporary issues faced by the Chicano community can be seen through the foci of both Chicano and cultural studies. In the 1990s these academic studies came forward to research the following subjects:

> 1) the strengthening of the borders and boundaries of US culture and society, 2) the dramatic increase and diversity of Chicana/o and Latina/o populations, 3) the ever constant flow of disenfranchised transnational (female/braceras) migrants, 4) the re-emmergence of state mandated propositions, trade policies, and globalization processes that target and displace impoverished laboring/immigrant communities, and 5) the proliferation of alternative cultural practices, movements, networks, and institutions. (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2006, p. 3)

The goal of these studies is to continue the fight for "alternative culture, representation, social justice, and equality" (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2006, p. 3). The historical obstacles faced by the Mexican American community helps to shape the way that the members imagine themselves, their art, and their border consciousness, which aided them in becoming informal art educators.

El Austin

> All places exist somewhere between the inside and the outside views of them, the ways in which they compare to, and contrast with, other places. A sense of place is a virtual immersion that depends on lived experience and a topographical intimacy that is rare today both in ordinary life and in traditional educational fields. From the writer's viewpoint, it demands extensive visual and historical research, a great deal of walking "in the field," contact with oral traditional and an intensive knowledge of both local multiculturalism and the broader context of multicenteredness. (Lippard, 1997, p. 33)

As in the preceding paragraphs concerning national activism, the struggle for educational, social, and political equality were also present in Austin. The first bilingual newspaper in Austin, *La Fuerza* (first edition 1962) provides insight into the life of

Mexican Americans in Austin, The motto, "*La Fuerza*: A Voice for the Spanish Speaking People of Central Texas" demonstrates the changing status for the Spanish Speaking community in the Capital City. No longer did residents have to depend on Anglo dominated media outlets. Within the pages of *La Fuerza*, citizens had an outlet to focus on topics that mattered to their neighborhoods and to showcase the faces and events of their leaders and community members. *La Fuerza* provided substantial coverage of community happenings and demonstrated a changing of the times for Mexican Americans, including the creation of space for them as residents of Austin and citizens the United States.

The editorial pages of *La Fuerza* gave voice to the political and societal concerns of the community. Many of the recurring themes included elections, anti-communism, and community activism. One such column appeared in June 1962 and demonstrated clearly the struggles faced by the community on questions of integration, identity, and civic participation. The column reads as follows:

> What are we? Where do we stand? Where are we going? All of us so called "Latin Americans," as an ethnic group of over a million and a half in this state, should ponder these questions for in their answers depend whether we shall or shall not be accorded our rightful place among our fellow Americans.
>
> We are often asked and sometimes criticized about keeping to ourselves and being clannish, about maintaining our language, customs, traditions, and in short, about not wanting to assimilate into the culture of our fellow countrymen. It is wondered why we retain the identity of the mother country of our fore-fathers (sic). We sometimes wonder ourselves why this is so. It may be that part of this withdrawal is self-imposed and part due to imposition by outside forces.

> It is very difficult in this highly complex and technical society of ours for a person with little or no knowledge of the English Language to participate and actively compete in an English speaking world. Feelings of inadequacy result in withdrawal. For this we cannot be entirely blamed. For Generations, education was beyond the reach of most of our citizens. Economic circumstances and necessity, the social status resulting therefrom, together with events in early Texas history, placed us in an unenviable position, a position where too often we were looked down upon with mistrust, scorn and even hate. These were scars not easy to heal. It was a situation from which one does not easily bounce back. It was one that required many years to effect a comeback. Unfortunately the comeback has been painfully slow. Slow, because of our own limitations, our reluctance to venture out, to assume our civic responsibilities and commensurately to assert our rights. Slow too, however, because there are those who, even today seek to maintain the social order of yesteryear, who would retard social progress and who would yet want you to believe that your domain is strictly limited. Those days are gone or fading fast. If you, my friend, were born or naturalized in the United States, despite the misnomer of "Latin American," you are a citizen of the United States and by common usage, an American.
>
> We are Americans, we stand as Americans and we are moving forward as Americans. (*La Fuerza*, 1962, p. 2)

The editorial describes a community with a strong cultural heritage resistant to assimilation into the greater "American" culture, held back by its reluctance to embrace the language of the majority and by forces beyond their power that limited their participation by denial of educational, economic, and political opportunities. Such strong words offered to the Hispanic community show a call to action for the Hispanic residents of Austin. They are encouraged to own their place in the community and their rights as citizens, and at the same time it stresses that they are "Americans." This simultaneous struggle to retain cultural heritage and to pursue active citizenship would continue to

present a challenge for Hispanics not only in Austin but also throughout the United States to the present day.

Lo presente: Austin, TX

Toma mi corazon…

I enter the weathered building expecting to see friends. Immediately the overwhelming smell—a mixture of beer, bodies, and cleaning agents—assaults my senses. The lights are dimmed and it takes a moment to adjust from the afternoon light outside. I soon identify several regulars milling around the bar and quickly seek out several possible partners.

The bajo sexto and accordion are in full swing leading the way for a round of cumbias, bolero's, waltz's and conjunto favorites. The band's songs may be rehearsed but they flow organically as they strum, beat, belt, croon, and tap the keys. The performance is enhanced by the activity of the dancers as they take the floor. Partners change, steps adapt to the bands choices, and Lone Stars are left on the tables as they swirl around the floor. Some pairs are halting, learning each others moves while others take part in a life long ritual of leader and follower, natural rhythms that flows as easily as the red velvet curtain that envelops the musicians.

Interested parties wait on the fringes of the circle waiting for their turn to move along to the rich sonidos of Conjunto Los Pinkys--hosted by the White Horse. Those taking a break from the twirling or have come solely as spectators create an audience for both the band and the dancers. Drinking, talking, and observing are the main course for these participants. Each person is involved in this production, embodying the traditions of Tejano culture, performance, and community.

Many of the same issues presented by *La Fuerza* persist in the Mexican American community in Austin today. The activism to preserve culture is present as well. It is unclear whether the White Horse, described above, intended the communal element of their Sundays with Conjunto Los Pinkys. However, for a neighborhood rapidly being swallowed up by gentrification, the afternoon conjunto performances provide a space for the Tejano community to come together and share a piece of their traditions with each other as well as with newcomers to their neighborhood. The East Side of Austin has

historically been separated by freeway IH 35, as well as by culture. The highway divides central Austin with the Mexican American neighborhoods. Residents cross the divide to do business, to see entertainment, and to go to school. The border itself works to define the nature of the people living/working/visiting there. As seen in the following excerpt, the borders not only affect current crossers but also those for many years after:

> The border alters the way that bodies carry and, indeed, perform themselves not only in the moment of encounter but also for years (and even generations) afterwards. Entire cultures have ben defined by their proximity to a border or by the border crossing of ancestors. Movement and geography are thus the critical factors against which a border is defined. (Rivera-Servera & Young, 2011, p. 2)

East Side Austin is no different. The residents there are shaped by the emerging metropolis and the subsequent breaking up of their communities. The White Horse creates a space where this "border crossing" can be inclusive. The space created for the conjunto cultural tradition amidst the young, hip makeover of the majority of other establishments on East Sixth streets demonstrates a respect for "what came before" and an inclusionary vision in the face of marginalization and segregation.

In their book, *Performance in the Borderlands* (2011), River-Servera & Young talk about the "ordering" or organizing of peoples' individual and communal activities:

> The performances addressed within this collection react against this ordering principle by seeking to transgress imagined and material lines of difference and by reflecting the political, cultural, economic, and social tensions that exist within communities who live within the borderlands. (p. 8)

The political and social ramifications of gentrification may not lay heavily on the minds of the dancers, musicians, and observers at these weekend dance parties, but everyone does reiterate the sentimientos of how great it is that such an event exists.

Through the music, dancing, and conversation a very rich fabric is being woven between each of the attendees. Families and friends come together there to celebrate, to socialize, to dance with their neighbors, and magically the threads of community are drawn tighter in an effort to patch what has almost been lost or has moved on from the East Side—a Tejano sensibility and display of cultural rituals.

Artists practicing in the borderland east and west of IH 35 are also affected by living between worlds. As Lippard (1997) points out about artists as wells as others: "Everybody comes from someplace, and the places we come from—cherished or rejected—inevitably affect our work" (p. 37). In this instance, where "they" (the artists interviewed in this work as well as myself) come from is a place of confluence where tongues flow between Spanish and English, Tecate and Lonestar dual for the most wanted beverage, and cowboy boots and chanclas both make their marks on the dance floor. In this place it is not so much important where you are from—Mexico, Texas, California, Ohio—but rather if you came to have a good time. The White Horse, while unique as a Conjunto bar in newly trendy East Side, it is not alone in the blending of cultures in Austin. From Austinites' personal space, to communities, and to the city as a whole, the central Texas town prides itself on mixing, questioning and redefining space. In this sense, "Places bear the records of hybrid culture, hybrid histories that must be woven into the mainstream" (Lippard, 1997, p. 8).

This environment, as we have seen here, is constantly in flux and influenced by countless factors. The construction of national and local borderlands is a give and take process between the inhabitants and the place where they reside. In the words of Lippard

(1997), "Our personal relationships to history and place form us, as individuals and groups and in reciprocal ways we form them. Land, history, and culture meet in a multicentered society that values place but cannot be limited to one view" (p. 9). The notion of where these elements meet must be taken into consideration when examining the endeavors and education of the subjects of this thesis.

LA AWARENESS

As we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, la lucha, the Mexican American struggle, is comprised of many significant battles, including eliminating discrimination, working toward education equality, linguistic acceptance, and political inclusion. These issues are intertwined in the identity of the culture and provide the motivation for many of the works seen through art and arts-related activities. The struggle informs the art and the art informs the struggle. We used this knowledge to become aware and the artists in this work use the conscious in their work. The following section details the work and awareness through art, aesthetic experience, and art exhibits.

In Lucy R. Lippard's book *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (1990), she speaks to the importance and collaboration of individual experience coupled with that of art and how various aspects of that experience work together to create our point of view:

> One's own lived experience, respectfully related to that of others remains for me the foundation for social vision, of which art is a significant part. Personal associations, education, political and environmental contexts, class and ethnic backgrounds, value systems and market values, all exert their pressures on the interaction between eye, mind, and image. (p. 7)

As the Chicano movement swept across the US in the mid to late twentieth century, it drew attention to the dueling identities faced by Mexican Americans and the external and internal factors that influence what we see and experience. As signified by their name, Mexican Americans is a combination of at least two distinct, yet intertwined cultures. Although everyone faces multiple identities every day, for example moving from work to home and vice versa, we shift from one to another as is necessary (Krebs, 1999). This notation of traveling between multiple words is evident in edgewalkers and their various worlds.

In "Confluencia de Culturas: An Interview with Jacinto Quirarte," Quirarte gives his own unique perspective of this combination of cultures as a first generation American and his journey from a child growing up in a Jerome, Arizona to becoming a prolific and respected scholar on Chicano Art (Karlstrom & Quirarte, 2005). Quirarte's autobiographical interview with Paul Karlstrom shows how Quirarte overcame financial barriers in order to go to college, his experience with cultural and identity issues when traveling and researching in Mexico as well as in the United States, and his overcoming of stereotypes and racism in the institution of art to become a successful artist, scholar, and activist (Karlstrom & Quirarte, 2005).

Judithe Hernández (2008) writes in her autobiographical account of her role in Los Four, a group of Chicana and Chicano artists, and how they used their art and a 'political aesthetic' to transform themselves into "guerrilla artists" set on changing the status quo for Mexican Americans. Ms. Hernández writes about the challenges she faced

not only within the Chicano Movement but also finding acceptance within her fellow muralists as one of the few women artists among the group of Chicano men. Hernández advocates for artists to use their work to further their citizenship and illustrates transformative ability of art to speak to the human condition across cultures (Hernández, 2008).

These examples give us a picture of the varying identities occurring simultaneously in the artist's lives. While awareness can be a tool for navigating and operating in multiple worlds, they can also be the cause for pain. Dr. Luis Urrieta Jr. (2003) spoke to the feelings of confusion and angst of being caught between worlds in his article "*Las Identidades También Lloran*, Identities Also Cry: Exploring the Human Side of Indigenous Latina/o Identities." Upon seeing an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a Mexican patron, coupled with an image of Juan Diego dressed in Cherokee attire, Urrieta states the following:

> I stood before the image as a U.S. citizen by birth, an "American" when abroad, a Latino at times, a Hispanic when I have to be, a Chicano politically, a Mexicano mestizo perhaps, a descendant of *P'urhépechas*, and simply *un hijo de campesinos* (a son of peasants/farmers) to others. (Urrieta, 2003, p. 149)

Shown here are the complexities of Urrieta's, Quirarte's, and Hernández's identities. One world is nested inside another. Inside this is another world. Their identities are manifested through their lives as well as through their art and art experiences. This is a challenge not only for Mexican Americans but also for everyone who lives between ethnic, social, economic, and gendered worlds.

One can identify with others existing in multiple worlds, yet it is impossible to completely understand the experience of another person. Diana Taylor (2003) points out the importance of recognizing that the individual experience is not translatable:

> Moreover, the problem of untranslatability, as I see it, is actually a positive one, a necessary stumbling block that reminds us that "we"—whether in our various disciplines, or languages, or geographic locations throughout the Americas—do not simply or unproblematically understand each other. I propose that we proceed from that premise—that we do not understand each other—and recognize that each effort in that direction needs to work against notions of easy access, decipherability and translatability. (p.15)

Once we acknowledge our own inability to really know a person, then we can begin to truly be open to learning and allowing the performer/artists/individual to speak for themselves. Art is a language we use to speak to one another. We use art to transmit our identity to those around us. For example, identity is a recurring theme in many contemporary Mexican American artists repertoires as seen in both the CARA: Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation; and Phantom Sightings: Art after the Chicano Movement exhibits. A collection of visual art, the CARA exhibit, which opened in 1990 at UCLA's Wright Art Gallery, exemplified the issues facing Mexican Americans in the United States. The traveling exhibit included a gamut of politicized subjects, from the creation of the Mestizo race, to racism, gender roles, and multiculturalism. The exhibit confronts the realities and misconceptions about Mexican Americans living inside (or outside) mainstream America (Gaspar de Alba, 1998).

"Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement," also a traveling art exhibition, began at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The exhibition explored the relationship between Chicanos and their environment through contemporary artists

such as Margarita Cabrera with her fabric sculptures, and Yolanda M. Lopez with her alternative portraits of the Virgen de Guadalupe, a patron saint of Mexico, as normal everyday women (Gonzalez, Fox, & Noriega, 2008). Identity politics resonates within this exhibition and characterized many of the issues faced by current Mexican American Artists (Shaked, 2008).

Contemporary Mexican American artists create work across the spectrum of visual and performing arts. These artists deliver innovative and copious specimens of art with a countless number of themes and mediums including political, religious, feminist, and satirical art, as well as metal works, portraiture, serigraph prints, and photographs (Keller, Erickson, Johnson, & Alvarado, 2002).

The exploration of Chicano identity is very rich because many of its discernable facets are clearly distinct, upon first glance. The blending of physical, cultural, and linguistic elements between that of the indigenous, Mexican, and American heritage can readily be dissected, identified, and categorized. However, it is the hidden intersections as these components come together where we can see the true beauty and art of Chicano identity and begin to see ourselves in the work.

LA TRANSCULTURATION

By attempting to understand and unravel the complexity of cultural identity, one can work towards participation and acceptance between cultures. To demonstrate the process of this transformation I engage the work of two well know Chicana/o poets. Their art is in the form of ink on a page, raw, unaltered words speaking on the subject of

identity, which generated connections with their readers through shared experience—a tool much needed in the world today where people are separated by imagined differences. The tools we engage to explain this process here are the archive and repertoire, borders, and transculturation.

Archive and Repertoire

I once heard that all art is appropriated. Works of art are never original but come from the images, materials, and ideas collected in our consciousness and subconscious throughout our being—The Archive of our lives. From conception, we appropriate our culture as well. We depend on our mother's warmth and protection and we hear the voices of all those in our presence. We are never truly alone, and our identity is shaped by what we experience. We are all, in essence, hybrids made up of separate pieces of all that we encounter and what we chose to put into action—The Repertoire of our experience.

In other words, archive is that which is stored knowledge, books, photos, and techniques, and repertoire is the arsenal of archival material put into action to create something new. In the words of Diana Taylor (2003) the repertoire,

> …enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing- in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. Repertoire, etymologically "a treasure, an inventory," also allows for individual agency referring also to "the finder, discoverer," and meaning "to find out. (p. 20)

This relationship of archive and repertoire is evident in the work of two Texas Chicana/o authors: Gloria Anzuldúa and Raúl Salinas. These two authors use their words

to reveal how their various archives work together to create an ever-changing repertoire of their art, theory, activism and life in general. Through the consistent crossing, erasing, and redefining of their bordered existence, Salinas and Anzuldúa turn the private, i.e., their thoughts, ideas, experiences, into public performance by delivering poetic works that describe their respective journeys. They took something normally found in the repertoire, i.e., their inner most feelings and reactions to society and themselves, and wrote it down to commit them to the archive of Chicano Studies and that of anyone experiencing their works.

In a book of poems, *A Trip Through the Mind Jail* (1980), Raúl Salinas a native of Austin, Texas, expresses his hopes, dreams, memories and frustrations with an unjust world. In the opening lines of the poem with the same name, Salinas invites the reader to take a trip to his childhood home in East Austin, or La Loma:

> Neighborhood of my youth
> demolished, erased forever from
> the universe.
> You live on, captive in the lonely
> cellblocks of my mind. (p. 55)

Salinas uses his words to generate the landscape of his memories, pictures so vibrant that they invite the reader to come along for the ride. There are stanzas filled with descriptive nostalgia such as this:

> Kids barefoot/snotty nosed
> playing marbles/munching on bean tacos
> (the kind you will never find in a café)
> 2 peaceful generations removed form their abuelos' revolution. (p. 55)

and:

Modest Mexican
maidens dancing polkas together
across splintered wooden floor. (p. 55)

This now-archived material also provides a vivid look into the public repertoire of Salinas. The act of publishing his work creates a performance between the author and the reader. The lines he passes on to his audiences are lived lessons, especially poignant in the lines above because Salinas is recounting his youth while serving time in Leavenworth prison. Diana Taylor speaks to the importance of conveying meaning through performance: "Performances function as a vital act of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard, Schechner has called "twice-behaved behavior" (Taylor, 2003, p. 3). Salinas uses his words as an opportunity to complete this "act of transfer," allowing the reader to partake in his experiences and learn from them, should they choose to do so.

Taylor speaks to the researchers of the Americas and how Western scholars rarely give credence to "mutual construction" of culture. To do this "would require that scholars learn the language of the people with whom they seek to interact and treat them as colleagues rather than as informants or objects of analysis" (Taylor, 2003, p. 10). By including Salinas' prison poetics in the broader academic work of Chicano/cultural studies, researchers can work to be more inclusive in the voices that are heard.

Salinas' performance provides a new way of understanding the world. Diana Taylor (2003) points out that all our daily-lived routines and identities are a part of performance, from civic citizenship to gender and ethnicity, we are consistently

practicing and acting out ourselves in connection with that which surrounds us. We can use this as a way of knowing, or an epistemology.

Culture is, in fact, a collage of layers of identity upon identity, each one different for each person. Many times, as much as culture can be individualized, humans try to sort out the world by grouping people together. This action of classifying similar things into a congruous mix also occurs at an academic level. Chicano/cultural studies as a discipline works to end this stereotyping by presenting multiple voices, as seen in the following:

> Chicano/cultural studies "simultaneously stimulates disparate processes of reterritorialization and cultural expression that openly challenge the authority as well as the future of conservative monocultural America. And in the face of the minoritizing practices of the dominant regimes of representation, Chicana/o cultural studies affirms a deep-seated "commitment to study the entire range of a society's arts beliefs, institutions, communicative practices" as well as the economic mediations of culture and society. (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2006, pp. 3-4)

Both Raúl Salinas and Gloria Anzuldúa use written performance to provide the reader an opportunity for the same enlightenment. Salinas, an ex-convict, activist, and poet, and Anzuldúa a feminist, Chicana, Tejana, professor, etc. show the complexity of their being and offer various points of entry for the reader to connect with their experiences and to create new knowledge together.

Borders

> A border defines. It structures space by establishing a point of reference that immediately and consequently positions people and objects in relation to itself. To stand on *this* or *that* side of the border is to either physically perform your belonging within a community or to trespass into another. It is to be domestic or foreign, home or abroad, insider or outsider, citizen or immigrant, at rest or on the

> move. A border transforms space into place. It creates nations and states in addition to smaller and less formalized social units. It keeps communities apart or forces them to remain together. (Rivera-Servera & Young, 2011, p. 1)

Although not unique to the Chicano experience, the idea of "borders" is greatly evidenced in the Mexican American identity. The work of Salinas and Anzuldúa highlight various geographical, physical, identity, cultural, social, and linguistic borders (to name a few). Rivera-Servera and Young (2011) go on to say that borders make culture by creating a way for telling one group of people from the next and that they help to shape our ideas about the world and our development. "Simply put, we are products of the borders that surround us. Our daily performances reflect our bordered existence" (p. 1). This can be attributed to the common archives and performed repertoire that communities and like cultures participate in, as discussed in the previous section.

In the following passages, Gloria Anzuldúa (1987), describes her bordered experience:

> I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling that Tejas-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape. (p. 19)

> The U.S.-Mexican border es *una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set-up to define places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* form *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a natural state of transition. (p. 25)

Anzuldúa, like many Chicanos, lives in this space between worlds, neither here nor there – *ni de aquí, ni de allá*. While the physical border denotes the geographical

space of *us* versus *them,* perhaps more damaging is the "emotional residue" of an "unnatural" border between humanity in a zero-sum game of living a bordered existence.

Like Anzuldúa, Salinas faced many borders not on account of his Xicanindo heritage (a person of Mexican American and indigenous heritage) but also due to the time he spent in various prisons. In *Trip Through the Mind Jail*, Salinas expresses his anguish over the inhumanity of incarceration and the new borders placed on him while being locked up, both internal borders placed on him by the American criminal system, as well as societal borders he encounters. Here, Salinas (1980) describes himself in an attempt to over come stereotypes associated with ex offenders:

> hoping not to conjure up visions of ogres & monsters in your mind, i'm a 37 yr. old, 3rice-convicted, narcotics (offended!) offender. Sounds like some kind of nasty, no? i'm also a human being. What little i know was acquired through self-study. Therefore, not too swift, really. All my confined days/months/years, spent going to school. Which isn't saying too much for this country, its educational system and penitentiaries; or any combination of the three. However, in the solace of my cell I have held discourse with some of the tougher scribes, bards, free-thinkers, maddening spirits and revolutionary minds. It hasn't been an easy task, and surely don't know what they're ALL about, but it has kept the boogey-man away. (p. 21)

Salinas first acknowledges the borders placed on him and his fellow inmates by society, and then works to erase them by pointing to his own humanity and the penitentiary education they use to define themselves. Salinas employs language to further define himself. His unique use of Spanish, English and Pachuco slang, coupled with his disregard for "standard" punctuation and capitalization, allows him to manipulate the print to match his own bordered culture and language.

While Salinas' poetics relishes in this hybrid style, Anzuldúa (1987) speaks to the difficulty of engaging multiple languages:

> I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong." (p. 75)

From the title of her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* to every page thereafter, Anzuldúa (1987) overcomes this early diversity and embraces the tongue that is her own:

> The switching of "codes" in this book from English to Castilllian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all of these, reflects my language, a new language-the language of the Borderlands. There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born. (p. 20)

Language use is one of the most obvious examples of Mexican American Edgewalkers. Here, Gloria Anzuldúa (1987) gives an example of her own complexity:

> Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live west in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages.
>
> Some of the languages we speak are:
>
> 1. Standard English
> 2. Working class and slang English
> 3. Standard Spanish
> 4. Standard Mexican Spanish
> 5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
> 6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)
> 7. Tex- Mex
> 8. *Pachuco* (called caló) (p.77)

Though Anzuldúa speaks all the languages listed above, she says that she only feels truly at home with other Tejanas. Thus when she traverses in all other worlds she is required to choose between one language or the other, or a mix of several.

While nations and humans may create physical, political, linguistic, etc. borders, many boundaries faced by humans are imagined. These are the physical, cultural, and emotional borders that ask to be crossed: "The border in not merely a wall or a body of water. It is a force of containment that inspires dreams of being overcome and crossed" (Rivera-Servera & Young, 2011, p. 2). Both Anzuldúa and Salinas come to embrace their borderland beings and have overcome the stereotypes placed on them by others and thus validate their own unique cultures that may have Chicana/o, Tejana/o, Xicanindio elements respectively, are just a part of what makes them who they are as individuals.

Edgewalkers

As seen in this discussion concerning the notions of archive and repertoire coupled with borders, we see that borderwalkers or "edgewalkers"(someone who can walk in multiple cultural worlds while maintaining their own personal culture [Krebs, 1999]) like Raúl Salinas and Gloria Anzuldúa, are not uncommon. Each one of us traverses various borders—cultural, social, and physical; however, we often continue to build borders that we want/seem to be impenetrable in order to keep the "other" out. However, Rivera-Servera and Young (2011) point out the difficulty in this: "Borders have always been porous; their ability to demarcate a limit often undone by crossings that render them a material and rhetorical failure" (p. 1).

What can we learn from this failure to define people, spaces, and cultures? There is an awareness gained by the crossing, redefining, experiencing bordered spaces. Anzuldúa (1987) explains below the knowing that is created in the borderlands:

> Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being "worked" on. I have the sense that certain "faculties"—not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored—and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. Strange, huh? And yes the "alien" element has become familiar- never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home. (p. 19)

Anzuldúa speaks to universality of the changing and multiplicity of human's identity, and that it is a part of a very basic biological evolution of gaining awareness of ourselves and others.

Salinas' poem *Trip Through the Mind Jail* (1980) successfully taps into the universal/shared experience with a nostalgic viaje/trip through his childhood:

> Neighborhood of my childhood
> neighborhood that no longer exists
> some died young--fortunate—some rot in prisons
> the rest drifted away to be conjured up
> in minds of others like them.
> For me: only NOW of THIS journey is REAL!
>
> Neighborhood of my adolescence neighborhood that is no more YOU ARE TORN PIECES OF MY FLESH!!!! Therefore, you ARE.
> LA LOMA----AUSTIN----MI BARRIO____
> i bear you no grudge
> i needed you then…identity… a sense of belonging
> i need you now
> so essential to adult days of imprisonment,
> you keep me away from INSANITY'S hungry jaws;
> Smiling/Laughing/Crying.

i respect your having been:
my Loma of Austin
my Rose Hill of Los Angeles
my West Side of San Anto
my Quinto of Houston
my Jackson of San Jo
my Segundo of El Paso
my barelas of Alburque
my WestSide of Denver
Flats, Los Marcos, Maravilla, Calle Guadalupe,
Magnolia, Buena Viusa, Mateo, La Seis, Chiquis
El Sur, and all Chicano neighborhoods that
now exist and once existed;
Somewhere…, someone remembers…..

14 Sept. '69
LEAVENWORTH (p. 60)

Every reader of this poem has had a childhood, and many can identify with this longing for what was, though it is not in existence now. Neighborhoods change as humans change and as Salinas himself changed. However, this too, is the universal experience. Salinas connects with his readers by mentioning barrios throughout the United States. Though the reader may not find their childhood home in the lines, it is easy to imagine your own in the list (15th Street, Parkersburg, WV.) In this way we, the reader, become part of the "transmission" and co-construction of knowledge as is part of the repertoire which:

> Requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by "being there," being part of the transmission. As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning. (Taylor, 2003, p. 20)

In this way we work to co-construct knowledge and being and participate in the process of transculturation or the "transformative process undergone by all societies as

they come in contact with and acquire foreign cultural material, whether willingly or unwillingly" (Taylor, 2003, p. 10). In essence, transculturation overcomes distinct archives, finds the commonality in repertoires, and strips away borders creating a space for shared experiences between humans. In the following passages, Anzuldúa speaks to the notion of what she calls **"**la facultad" or a deep knowing. It is a sixth sense, if you will, which seems to encapsulate the process of awareness generated by transculturation:

> *La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant "sensing," a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (Anzuldúa, 1987, p. 60)

We see how *la facultad* works to envision beyond the archive and repertoire to a subconscious level. The use of *la facultad* however is not always easy and can create fear by letting go of the everyday life, in this case our bordered existence, to lower our defenses and to obtain a "new seeing":

> Fear develops the proximity sense aspect of *la facultad*. But there is a deeper sensing that is another aspect of this faculty. It is anything that breaks into one's everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one's defenses and resistance, anything that takes one from one's habitual grounding, causes the depths to open up, causes a shift in perception. This shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul). We plunge vertically, the break, with its accompanying new seeing, makes us pay attention to the soul, and we are thus carried into awareness- an experiencing of soul (Self). (Anzuldúa, 1987, p. 61)

However, like in transculturation, reaching this new level of awareness can only come to pass by opening oneself to new cultures, people, and experiences to a mutually constructed epistemology.

> We lose sometimes this mode of initiation, something is taken from us: our innocence, our unknowing ways, our safe and easy ignorance…. Confronting anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality increases awareness and *la facultad*. (Anzuldúa, 1987, p. 67)

LA CONCLUSION

In fact, cross cultural perception demands the repudiation of many unquestioned, socially received criteria and the exhumation of truly "personal" tastes. (Lippard, 1990, p.7)

While *la facultad* may be difficult for many to understand or experience, when we break down the human experiences into our respective archives, repertoires, and borders we can begin to see how we are connected. Through the works of Raúl Salinas and Gloria Anzuldúa we can recognize how public poetic performance art can work to dissolve the divides between people and connect one person to another. This transculturation process works to draw people together through shared and co-constructed experience.

Through this progression, one can also generate social awareness. This is necessary today in our world of ever changing boundaries and the creation of identity borders by society, the media, politicians, etc. as seen in the following quote from Lippard (1997):

> Since the eighties, culture has become a euphemism for race and ethnic background, a key word in the identity politics that has crossed the tracks into

> academic parts of town, (The danger here is of fencing people in with cultural preconceptions, using the term to explain away things we don't understand- "it's just our/their culture…"). (p. 11)

Instead of "explaining things away," what if we could use our informal art communities to understand and connect with other cultures. The search to find shared experiences through dance, photos, exhibits, murals etc. may work to draw communities together. As Lippard (1997) explains here:

> Like the places they inhabit, communities are bumpily layered and mixed, exposing hybrid stories that cannot be seen in a linear fashion, aside from those "preserved" examples which usually stereotype and oversimplify the past. As community artists can testify, it takes a while to get people to discard their rose-colored glasses and the fictional veneer of received "truths." Community doesn't mean understanding everything about everybody and resolving all the differences; it means knowing how to work within differences as they change and evolve. (p. 24)

In this way edgewalkers are good educators because they know how to work within their differences. They are constantly walking between worlds and are accustomed to the experiences of various cultures. The artists who participated in this thesis succeed not only at doing this but also in educating me about their art and their various worlds. As presented above, this process begins with curiosity and knowledge, continues with an awakening of awareness and application of the latter. Finally, transculturation and sociocultural learning take place and generate overlapping boundaries instead of fixed borders.

Each of the following chapters follows this same process. Though presented in a linear manner, the process is cyclical and continuously evolving: curiosity breeds knowledge gathering, which develops into awareness, and transforms into

transculturation, and so forth. Taken from interviews with four of my informal art educators, the chapters that follow provide the reader with a look into this process as I learned from them, as well as their own processes of transculturation.

Chapter 3: La Researcher

Grito Mexicano (Spanish pronunciation: [ˈgrito mexiˈkano], Mexican scream), or simply grito, is a part of Mexican culture. It is similar to the yahoo or yeehaw of the American cowboy during a hoedown, except with added trills and an onomatopoeia closer to "aaah" or "aaaayyyyeeee." The first sound is typically held as long as possible, leaving enough breath for a trailing set of trills. The grito is officially used as a celebratory remembrance of Mexican Independence Day, [1] as in the Grito de Dolores. In non-formal settings, the grito is belted at parties and friends or family celebrations. The normal position for the yell to be inserted (either by the singers themselves or the listening audience) is at a musical interlude or bridge or after the first few notes of a familiar song. (Grito Mexicano, 2013)

LA INTRODUCTION

When I first moved to Austin eight years ago I had a roommate who loved to dance. One evening we went to a popular downtown club to dance salsa. At the end of the night something strange began to happen. The music turned from discoteca jams to slower, more emotive rancheras. I became a bit alarmed when the largely Hispanic crowd began to sing the songs while almost sobbing to the lyrics. Bridges were punctuated by the yelling aaaayyyeee by multiple participants. Taken aback, I asked my friend what was going on and he said something to the effect that this was "normal" and that Mexicans always sing these songs like this.

At the time, I had no idea the significance of these canciones and why they had such an impact on the crowd. Eight years later you can find me singing, crying, and screaming to the same rancheras by the greats such as Vicente Fernandez, Lydia Mendoza, and Chavela Vargas. The grito comes so naturally to me now that it comes unbidden at fiestas, music festivals, and in everyday conversations when I am excited

about something. I have moved from an unknowing outsider observing this cultural nuance to intuitively participating in the tradition.

How did I shift from observer to participant in the Mexican American community? The following selections highlight aspects of this process, from cultural curiosity to pursuing knowledge about the Mexican American community, to recurring movements of awareness and sustained transculturation: in other words, the process of becoming an Edgewalker. This transitional process is not always linear but rather one that is a cyclical and cumulative. I am consistently curious. This approach to life leads me to find out more information, which generates awareness and fosters transculturation. The development of my transculturation happens through many avenues, yet I chose to express my journey through my experience with the Chicano arts community because of its relevance and influence on my life, which allows me to describe it in detail and with emotion.

LA CURIOSITY

When I first came to Texas, I felt lost and alone. I clearly remember standing beneath the shadow of The University of Texas Tower and thinking—"I don't know a soul here." That would soon change, of course, as I embarked on my graduate and professional careers and established a life in Austin for the next several years. This section explains how my curiosity led me to find a place for myself in Austin through participation in the Chicano community.

La Appalachia al East Side

Having grown up in a small town where everyone knew each other or at least shared a friend or a second cousin once removed, living in a city the size of Austin was overwhelming. While I made friends with students within my graduate program, I still felt a bit out of place among the other Latin American Studies majors, many of who had experienced privileged international and educational experiences quite different from my own. While many of those students had parents who were professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and professors I, the daughter of a construction worker and stay at home mom, was second only to my brother as the first in my family to go to college.

I recall one example of how these differences became evident. In a social policy class discussion I could contribute my experiences where others could not. We often discussed issues such as labor unions and unemployment benefits and we would use my family as an example. My father, apparently the only blue collar worker among the group's parents, would be an example for many of the social and labor policies. It was at this time when I clearly started to become aware of my different and somewhat unique life circumstances, when compared to that of my classmates. I had a perspective that many of my peers did not. My ability to connect to the subjects we were studying came not only in the form of cultural or academic circumstances but on a more profound socioeconomic level of the haves, the have-nots, and the haves-a-little.

Upon graduation, I promptly got a job and moved to East Austin, a neighborhood that I thought might be more comfortable for me and my socioeconomic background and international interests. A historically and predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, I had been introduced to the community by a friend who had shown me the beautiful character

of the East Side. Soon enough, I was getting to know my new little barrio, exploring the streets, patronizing the businesses, and making acquaintances. Growing up in the country gives a person a special ability to be, as it were, neighborly. Driving down our gravel road in Cutler, Ohio, it is customary to wave or at least nod to your neighbors who may be outside giving hay to their livestock, gardening, or unloading a week's supply of groceries from the back of their pickups. This learned friendliness and my natural proclivity toward meeting new people served me well in my new house on Garden Street in the 78702 zip code.

One of the primary reasons for moving to the East Side was to be closer to the Mexican American Community. I had traveled to Mexico several times during my undergraduate and graduate work and established a considerable partiality to all things Mexican and several lifelong friendships. This connection inspired me to seek out political, cultural, and community events in my neighborhood.

Hecho en MACC

The Mexican American Cultural Center, later it would be renamed the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, or MACC, opened in 2005, and a local TV station, Music and Entertainment TV, was there to report on the grand opening. I watched eagerly as the host interviewed community members involved in the opening and I was hopeful for the cultural and arts activities that would be available to me at the Center. I attended the opening of the facility and decided that I wanted to become more involved in their work.

A few months later, in January I contacted the MACC and began volunteering there. The first event I helped with was Hecho a Mano, a monthly event for artists and performers to present their wares to the community. I continued to volunteer and soon became a familiar face at the MACC. I would help at special events, monitor the gallery, and come to classes to create my own art. Eventually, four and a half years after I started volunteering, I was appointed to the MACC Advisory Board to advise the Austin City Council on recommendations for the Center.

From the opening day, I knew this was no ordinary cultural center. The community and political figures turned out in droves to the openings and I would soon learn that the idea for the space was thought up over forty years before, give or take a few, depending on who you talked with. Everyone seemed to agree that they had had to fight for the building to come to pass, and the struggle itself surely had political, economic, and cultural implications.

Volunteering at the MACC and making friends with the staff and artists that frequented there, many of whom were Mexican American, drew me even more to the Chicano community. The connections and experiences came forward in a natural river of immersion. My mutual identification came in part because my MACC friends were facing identity struggles like I was, living between worlds. Here, Guillermo Gomez-Peña (1989) describes this in-between state and how Edgewalkers like myself operate between worlds, thus creating a "third landscape":

The strength and originality of Chicano-Latino contemporary art in the U.S. lies partially in the fact that it is often bicultural, bilingual, and/or biconceptual. The fact that

artists are able to go back and forth between two different landscapes of symbols, values, structures, and styles, and/or operate within a "third landscape" that encompasses both, gives them an obvious advantage over other artists. A "border consciousness" necessarily implies the knowledge of two sets of reference codes operating simultaneously. The challenge is to fully assume this biculturalism, develop it and promote it (p.113).

Navigating these worlds between my modest country upbringing in Appalachia, to my travels in Mexico, and the academic world of higher education, I no longer fit comfortably in any single area. Rather, I have created my own "border consciousness" that I saw mirrored in my friends. Sparked by my curiosity, I pursued new experiences and found a community where I could be myself—Cassie the Ohioan, Cassie the Spanish Speaker, Cassie the Austinite, etc.

EL KNOWLEDGE

Urged on my newfound Edgewalkers and the exciting world of Chicano culture, I began to seek out new experiences and as much information as was possible. While I would eventually pursue a master's degree in community based arts education, my informal education outside the classroom enveloped my life. Art openings, late night concerts, drink and draws, volunteering, and hanging with my friend provided me an insight not only into the arts community but also of the complex labyrinth of Chicanidad. While my experiences are too many for this work, here I outline some memorable

exploits and lessons from My Chicano Education, more of which are woven into the rest of this thesis.

Mexic-Arte

Often times my knowledge took the direction of firsthand participation. For example, late one Saturday afternoon in October I donned moustache, straw sombrero, and two rounds of (plastic) ammunition and marched to Plaza Saltillo on Austin's East Side in response to Mexic-Arte's call to arms of one hundred Mexican Revolutionaries for the annual Day of the Dead celebration. I, in my Emiliano Zapata regalia, joined the other revelers in mocking death and honoring deceased loved ones.

Figure 1: Los Dos Zapatas.

As I traversed the infamous Sixth Street, guiding a eight foot tall papier-mâché Frida Kahlo over pot holes and train tracks, I could not help but notice the awe-filled stares of tourists, wedding parties, and bar-goers as the myriad of costumes and colors wound by in a parade of underworld visitors. I wondered what these out-of-towners must think of this tradition. Were they familiar with Día de los Muertos? Did they have similar celebrations in their cities and towns? Or, was this caravan a lesson, perhaps

community art education in action? It was in this moment that I was determined to know more about the environment in which such unique cultural occurrences take place.

Mexic-Arte, the organizer of the event, has been instrumental in furthering my Chicano Education. The philosophy of the museum, which has been recognized as the Official Mexican and Mexican American Fine Art Museum by the state of Texas and is: "Dedicated to cultural enrichment and education through the presentation and promotion of traditional and contemporary Mexican, Latino, and Latin American art and culture" (Mission Statement, 2013).

Founded in 1984, by Sylvia Orozco, Sam Coronado, and Pio Pulido, the Museum continues to provide diverse and innovative events from artists throughout Texas, the United States, and Latin America. Exhibits range from modern and popular art to traditional collections of indigenous Mexican artifacts. Showcasing both emerging and established artists, I could not help but learn about and meet many practicing artists in Austin.

One of the most exciting exhibits for me was 31K Portraits for Peace by photographer Diego Huerta. Huerta traveled throughout Mexico taking pictures of its residents from all walks life, geographical regions, and socio economic status. Each of the subjects of the portraits held an origami blue dove to symbolize their wish for peace in Mexico amid the devastation of the widespread murders from drug- and gang-related violence. Like many of Mexic-Arte's exhibits, this one was interactive. Visitors could create their own dove, like those in the photos and take a portrait for peace in front of the Austin skyline. Huerta's goal was to "counteract the negative impact of more than 31,000

deaths" since 2007 and "to change people's minds and turn their negative thoughts into something positive." He spread his message "Peace Starts by Believing" to the people he met along the way and Mexic-Arte helped to share this message with Austin and the visitors to the exhibit in 2012 (31K Portraits for Peace, 2013).

From its Young Latino Arts Program to Educational talks, youth program and the Dead Parade and celebration, Mexic-Arte embodies community art in action and helps to add much to my informal art education with a Parade of Chihuahuas, Calaveras, and mustached art education students.

Austin History Center Oral History Project

After firmly establishing myself in Austin, one master's degree and two jobs later, I decided that I wanted to go back to school for Art Education. This decision, I am sure, was influenced greatly by my work at the MACC. I decided to focus in community art education and on the Mexican American art community in Austin. When it came time to decide on the location of my required internship, I knew that I wanted to complete it in that community. I began looking for a new location to further my knowledge of the Mexican American community and I thought of the Austin History Center (AHC). Four years before this I participated in an Oral History Workshop called "Preserving the Voices." The workshop was put on by the Mexican American Liaison from the AHC, Ms. Gloria Espitia. Gloria and I were not aware of it at the time, but that day we would begin a common history of studying Mexican American history and culture.

I had heard that Gloria was working on a project that would document the struggle for the initiation and development of MACC during the past 40 years. I decided that there would be few better ways to get to know the community than by working on this project that would consist of volunteers and Gloria herself interviewing forty of the most influential persons involved in the long process of establishing and building the ESB MACC. The list, chosen by an advisory committee from the community, consisted of community members, activists, artists, and political figures. My role would include interviewing members from the list selected by Gloria, assisting with the closing program, and to write a report on my findings.

The remarkable thing about all my interviewees, and the remaining forty on the list, is that they all truly contributed uniquely to the past and current state of the MACC. Each is their own "piece of the puzzle," as Gloria would say. I had the opportunity to speak with some of the most influential players in the Mexican American puzzle in Austin. Included in the list of eight I interviewed were: Herlinda Zamora, current manager of the MACC; Clemencia Zapata a staple in the Austin Latino music world; Dr. Emilio Zamora a historian and professor at The University of Texas; Roén Salinas an Austin native and director and dancer in the Aztlán Dance Company; Juan Oyervides the current MACC Advisory Board Chair; Velia Sanchez-Ruiz, current board member and long time community activist; Jaime Beamon the architect on record of the MACC; and Marylou Castillo president of Lupe Arte and longtime Austin arts advocate.

At times, my interviews with these participants were difficult as they described the good, the bad, and yes sometimes the ugliness of their experiences. For example, Ms.

Marylou Castillo, born and raised in Lampasas, Texas, dreamed of moving to Austin, a city that she had visited so often as a child. When she finally got the chance to move to Austin for work, she relished the idea of being surrounded by art and culture and, more importantly, by others in the Latino community who shared her interests. However, when she finally moved to Austin in the late 1990s, what she found was a community divided by the prospect of a Mexican American Cultural Center. Marylou found herself in a place where individuals were asking her to take sides. Marylou was devastated by the realization that she would not have the support or the opportunities of which she had dreamed. She decided to create her own non-profit organization to help emerging Latina Artists—Lupe Arte or, Latinas Unidas Por El Arte (Smith, 2012a).

Another participant, Ms. Velia Sanchez-Ruiz talked about the discrimination she and her family encountered in Austin. School segregation, poor neighborhood environments, and sub-par working conditions were just a few of the challenges she and many others faced. There were few opportunities for her and her friends' children to participate in arts activities in her neighborhood. The friends decided to round up their children and drive them to a recreation center in west Austin where they would become the first Latinos participating in programming there (Smith, 2012c).

Every participant in the MACC Oral History Project had the unique opportunity to have their voice heard. For me, the opportunity to share in these stories was not only beneficial for my academic interests, but also in developing relationships and community partners and increasing my awareness about the struggles that we all face through life. I also became aware of the importance of place. It became not only a space to perform, to

showcase artists, or teach students, but moreover about having a space to belong. It was a place that had so long been denied minorities in Austin. I could not have seen this without my internship. The MACC was not simply a building, gallery, stage, or zócalo. Rather, it was a stake in a community that had historically discriminated against its own. It exemplifies the struggle to take a dream and make it a reality.

As I delved further into this history I could also feel myself putting down more firmly established roots in the community. The interviews gave me a very intimate passage into the personal lives of my collaborators. The shared experience of reliving so many memories enabled me to connect to people with whom I never would have imagined doing so. I could ask profound questions about their personal histories and that of the ESB MACC, which normally would be saved for close friends.

The Austin History Center and Mexic-Arte helped to increase my knowledge of people and their community, both entities provided integral lessons in my informal art education. I learned that while informed by my academic background, I could only learn through the experience, which helped increase my ability to understand and take part in another culture. In reference to Gomez-Peña's notion of "border consciousness," Elizabeth Garber (1995) says that this "biculturalism" can be developed and promoted through immersion in another culture such as within my experiences with the Oral History Project and Mexic-Arte (p.113).

LA AWARENESS

Garber (1995) proposes a method for using awareness and border consciousness to learn about cultures (I would propose, "seemingly") dissimilar from our own:

> In the development of a border consciousness through formal education, two areas can be identified. We must learn—the art, history, literature and narratives stories, popular and folk images, political ideas, everyday lives, spirituality, even the language of the culture we study. (p. 223)

This consciousness should include literature and firsthand experiences within the community. She also suggests that ethnographic research is an effective method in art education to do this (Garber, 1995). For me, this has been true. While I have not always sought out information about the Mexican American community as "ethnographic research," I have been observing, taking notes, investigating, and seeking knowledge of my own accord due to my curiosity and interest in the community.

During my many and varied experiences in the Chicano arts community, I came to ranging degrees and moments of awareness about myself, the community I was living in, and overarching themes of identity, border consciousness, and edgewalking. During this immersion I began to change the way I think of myself, or rather not thinking at all and simply existing in multiple worlds. This follows Garber's (1995) statement that we "must also work to develop new ways of thinking and valuing that we are influenced by our interactions with the culture we are coming to understand" (p. 223). I follow with specific examples of times when I can clearly define moments of coming into a state of awareness through arts experiences.

Peligrosa All-Stars

One of my favorite weekend/evening activities was to attend Peligrosa All-Stars dance parties. Peligrosa is a collective of DJs with various hybrid Latino backgrounds, such as Colombia, Puerto Rico, Panama, and Mexico, with each one of them calling Austin their home. With such mixed cultures, it is no wonder that Peligrosa's musical influences are just as diverse, including Cumbia, Salsa, Merengue, Porros, Gaitas, Reggaeton, Son, Bachata, Kuduro, Eletcro, and Funk, to name a few (Peligrosa All Stars, 2013). Peligrosa is noted for combing various genres of music and video to create a collage of sights, sounds, and cultures.

Peligrosa shows are always packed to the brim with people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. This is due, in large part, because the group crosses musical borders and appeals to a culture of edgewalkers who are also embodying a border consciousness. At these shows you do not have to choose who you are, but instead enjoy all parts of your music tastes in one venue.

One particular night at a Peligrosa All-Stars show at the Scoot Inn in East Austin, the DJs spun such artists as Celso Piña and Snoop dog in the same set while they projected a dancing Fred Astaire in the background in video that they paused and spun, much like they were mixing music to create a seamless fusion of seemingly very different media. I realized that these Latino, male, DJs were drawing from the same common archives as my own, and that when they included them in their performance repertoires I could understand, identify, and enjoy the event despite and because of its conflicting cultural artifacts. In that moment I realized how I am, as are many people in Austin, an edgewalker, someone who can walk in multiple cultural worlds while maintaining their

own personal culture. I further began to understand the importance of all my years learning, experiencing, and participating in other cultures. This was the dawn of a new self-awareness of realizing that I can walk between multiple worlds without losing myself. In fact, self was now defined by these new and preexisting worlds, and moving me into a third landscape.

Aztlán Contra Danza

Becoming aware of this third landscape within yourself is important. It becomes even more pivotal when you realize there are others existing in, if not exactly the same, a similar range of alternative cultures. Like the Peligrosa All Stars, the Aztlán dance company provided me with another space within this world. Founded in 1974, the Aztlán Dance Company was created by Ms. Maria Salinas for her children so that they could learn ballet folklórico. Now, some 40 years later, the dance group has kept its traditional roots but goes a step further to blend those rhythms with modern dance moves. Aztlán succeeds in its focus by creating a space for "imagining, creating, and presenting dance projects that reflect and inspire the communities within which it works" (About Us, 2013). In their own words:

> Aztlán Dance Company is bold and fearless in creating innovative work in dance that challenges tradition(s), expanding the theatrical space in order to narrate our cultural experiences and expressive realities. AZTLÁN 's signature blend of dance fuses indigenous, folk, and contemporary Latin forms into rich moving dialogues that speak beyond the present. Whether presenting traditional or the exciting AZTLÁN New-Works dance repertorio, the AZTLÁN Dance Company is committed to promoting cultural understanding and celebration of American cultural diversity. (About Us, 2013)

Aztlán's Contra Danza show in 2010 fulfilled this description perfectly. It was "fearless"—so fearless that it included Mexican Luchadores fighting it out on the stage while dancing their moves to cumbia—"innovative." The dance "narrated cultural experiences" combining two cult favorites, lucha libre with cumbia, in a manner of performance art in Austin, Texas. Seeing the dancers in combat furthered my own cultural understanding of how much I had immersed myself in Mexican and Mexican American culture. Just like the Peligrosa, this third landscape, enabled me to connect with others of the same community. Like a recipe, we are made of the same ingredients—parts Mexican, parts American, and parts Austin—with each one of us having our own individual cooking instructions and garnishes.

Figure 2: Advertisement for Aztlán Contra Danza. Courtesy of Aztlán Dance Company.

Aztlán works closely with Codebreaker Creative, LLC, a guerrilla marketing group, to design its advertising materials. For the Contra Danza show Codebreaker used an alternative campaign of performance art and video shorts to promote the show. One of the videos, all of which where distributed via Facebook and You Tube, was entitled "Interview with La Rosebud," and it was just that: an interview with one of the luchadoras—La Rosebud who also happens to be a taco vendor by day. The video shows La Rosebud selling tacos out of the back of a truck while the interviewer asks questions outside the view of the audience. La rosebud is dressed in everyday clothes but sporting her luchadora mask. The interviewer finishes his questions and then asks for a beef fajita taco to go. As the transaction is made, an astonished onlooker stands by staring as the two complete their interaction.

Upon observing the video, I noticed that gender, cultural, professional, and national roles were all transgressed in creating the work. Visually, the video showed quite a quotidian scene from our lives in Austin, a mobile taco vender in a nondescript parking lot. La Rosebud embodies the complexity of the human identity existing in multiple socio-cultural environments. Just like most Austinites, she has a normal everyday job—she sells tacos out of the back of her mobile luncheria. But she also has a night profession in the ring, and the two jobs are seemingly inseparable. La Rosebud is just as "sweet and thorny" selling her fajita tacos as she is in the ring. She is not asked to choose between one or the other or forced to make them alternative identities, as many are forced

to do. She is at the same time aggressive and domestic, a cook and a fighter, feminine and masculine.

It is especially appropriate that the video used both Codebreaker collective members as well as an Aztlán dancer to create the short. Both groups moved from their everyday roles to produce the work. In regard to their characters, there was a seamless border crossing for the interviewer and La Rosebud. To them, it seemed like this was just an everyday transaction, both with the interview as well as with the purchasing of lunch. However, the onlooker is speechless, awed by what he is seeing. He is apparently not clued in to the social implications of the event taking place before him. His shock demonstrates what can happen when people are unprepared for or are unable to exist within multiple, overlapping, borders.

Intuitively, I knew that the advertisement crossed border after border after border. The dialogue and imagery were so fluid that one could not recognize the dividing lines at all. Aztlán 's dance and this video heightened my awareness of my own border crossings, and the fact that I can understand its significance and humor demonstrates I also can exist in this undefined space.

Both Aztlán Dance Company and the Peligrosa All Stars worked to provide moments of aesthetic experience where upon seeing, hearing, and participating in their work I became aware of my undefined space and border consciousness. The group's respective blending of cultures was a reflection of my own and created a third landscape where we could co-exist and appreciate the mixture.

LA TRANSCULTIRATION

Do you want to be Mexican?
No, I just want to be me.

We might view our relationship with another culture as a friendship. When we are friends with another person, we don't become that person, but we value the way they do things, what they say, what they like and value. They influence us and the friendship changes us (Garber, 1995, p. 229).

Thus far you have learned about me, my curiosity, and how I became aware of my border consciousness through my involvement in the Mexican American arts community. I now reveal events that evidence the element of transculturation. These moments are so important because the remind us and reinforce the fact that humans are more alike than we are different. When we can accomplish this, whether through the arts or by other means, we can work toward building community and nurture understanding between cultures. Garber (1995) explains the process of tearing down borders such as I have outlined above in order to establish a relationship with another culture:

> To understand that there is no single idea, no one model of being a "good" U.S. American, and no single model of the cultural U.S. is a first step in meeting another culture. With this first "border" let down, a second step is to begin to embrace not only the symbols of a culture, but its traditions and values. This is the learning part. We reach out to a culture other than our own, and we assimilate it—over time. Time is crucial. (p. 229)

The following paragraphs present experiences where I reached a state of transculturation amongst cultures. In both instances, I felt a deep connection with the subjects, whether within an artwork, or with participants or projects. I also made a

conscious effort to spread this awareness to others and to partake in projects that I believed would be culture-changing.

La Inmensidad

A moment of transformation occurred for me upon attending a gallery opening at the MACC. The exhibit displayed the work of Maceo Montoya and his collection of works featuring the every day lives of Mexican immigrants living in northern California.

One of the works entitled *La Inmensidad* depicted a weathered mobile trailer home with a sky bordering on sunny and incoming storm clouds. I was struck by the scene and could not stop staring at it. A wave of emotion so potent surged through me that I almost cried. The scene looked very much like my home in Ohio. I grew up in a similar mobile home, and to have someone present it as a beauty, worthy of being saved in a painting and displayed on the walls of a museum, struck me to the core.

My modest upbringing was a great force in my life and I have never hidden it, though at the same time I have not been necessarily vocal about growing up poor. In Montoya's work I found an understanding with the work and a validation of the beauty of my experience in its simplicity. The aesthetic experience became transcendental when I decided to share my personal discovery with others. I shared this experience in a talk at the Texas Art Education Association Conference in November 2012. It has always been difficult for me to talk about my home. However, after seeing *La Inmensidad* I felt like it was an opportunity to connect with others and demonstrate well how art can bridge the

gap between people through shared experience. Krebs (1999) notes here the ability of edgewalkers to understand and transmit cultural complexity:

> Unlike most people, they have chosen to embrace cultural complexity, to see differences as enriching rather than debilitating, to walk the edge. Because edgewalkers embrace cultural complexity with unusual creativity, they provide insight into ways groups and individuals deal effectively and openly with difference. (p. 2)

I used this "insight" to engage my audience at the conference. A few of the attendees to my presentation spoke up about their own similar personal experiences and were appreciative of what I had shared. The connections that we made, though temporary, were born out of my connections that transgressed cultures.

Uprooted Dreams

As I reach new levels of transculturation (as I noted, it is an ongoing and cyclical process), I seek out new projects to work on that embody this notion of a bordered consciousness. In the summer of 2012 I participated as volunteer in a City of Austin Art in Public Places (AIPP) project with the ESB MACC and Artist Margarita Cabrera. Instead of using the AIPP grant to create a piece of art by herself, Cabrera, a well establish Mexican Artist living in the United States, decided to invite marginalized members of the Austin community to come and learn and create the art to be part of a permanent installation in the MACC.

Various non-profits and organizations working with these communities were contacted to see if they had members or clients who might be interested in participating in this project. Immigrant participants were highly recruited because of their

marginalized place in the community. Eighteen participants were accepted and invited to come and learn how to make Alebrijes, Oaxacan wood carvings from two Mexican artists. These artists had studio space available six days a week and completed the whole process from collecting wood from a nearby park to designing their pieces, and then sanding and painting them.

I decided to participate in the project because I wondered what this process would be like for the participants. Most of them had never participated in a project such as this, and often spoke of the transformative nature of the experience. I was surprised when the students became my teachers. My first Saturday as a volunteer found me helping Selene, one of the students, to sand her found piece of wood. I had never sanded with a machine prior to this, and the student soon became a teacher as she showed be how to maneuver and smooth out the rough edges of the wood. Though Selene and I were from different cultures and had not met prior to this, we bonded over sandpaper and wood.

Throughout the process Cabrera included several round-table discussions where the participants could speak about what they had learned. Many had come to the United States expecting to return home soon. Years later they were still living in the US though as part of a marginalized immigrant community. They also spoke to the process of creating the Alebrijes and how it became cathartic for them. At the reception for the project, all the participants were proud of their work and shared their stories. I felt as if I had taken part in the process, if in a small way, by sharing myself with them through the art.

LA CONCLUSION

It is lonely living between cultures. Edgewalkers repeatedly speak about not fitting in, feeling more participant-observer than integrated into a group. The "promise of "belonging" is one the melting pot has not been able to fulfill. Learning how people handle this question of the "not quite right fit" is key in expanding our edge walker capacities (Krebs, 1999, p. 31).

It is through these informal art education experiences that I demonstrated the process and power of my transculturation within the Mexican American community of Austin. Beginning with curiosity and my quest for knowledge, this led to a personal awareness and my own transculturation. I constantly traversed worlds, not only between ethnic communities but also with my professional, academic, and personal worlds. This transformative process was and continues to be incredibly difficult at times. While it is empowering to know and accept yourself even though you do not fit stereotypes, at times it is lonely and awkward. I live for the moments, such as those in the previous pages, when I find others who also exist in a landscape similar to my own.

Krebs (1999) explains here how edgewalkers can use this awareness and transculturation to connect and "interpret" them for others:

> I was intrigued by how they used their humility in their directness often touched me. I was intrigued by how they use their experiences to understand their complex worlds and interpret them for others. I am learning from these edgewalkers how to find the places in myself that connect with people from different backgrounds and cultures and to speak from those places. (p. 11)

With this thesis I interpret the worlds of the informal art educators in my life so that the reader may also connect with them and their experience.

Chapter 4: El Visual Artist

LA INTRODUCTION

> I do my street art mainly to keep rooted in that "who I am." If an artist doesn't have his own rules then he's playing with those of the artworld, and you know those are stacked against you…. Working the way I do, collecting stuff and letting it build up around me, feels very good. I can't do any wrong. The objects find each other. It all flows together and that feels very fine. I like the energy of used things. I like my objects to have spirit already in them. (Lippard, 1990, p. 64)

In Lucy Lippard's interview with sculptor David Hammons referenced above, Hammons describes how he establishes his own ways of creating work. He purposely lives by his own rules and not those of the "artworld." This chapter focuses on visual artist Briar Bonifacio (note that this is his artist name and the name that he preferred to be known as in this work) and his own unique styles of creating art and his incorporation of place as integral parts of his process and his palette. The engagement is described by way of my informal art education and the process of transculturation, including stages of curiosity, knowledge, awareness, and transculturation. My interview with Briar took place on May 25, 2013 at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center. The references and quotes I use from my conversations with Briar are part of this interview unless otherwise referenced.

LA CURIOSITY

When I first visited Briar Bonifacio's apartment, I felt as if I had come home. His iTunes collections, apparently on "shuffle all" because of random selections as Christmas

music coming into the mix, provided the soundtrack for the space and for the film *Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* playing on mute on his computer. There was art strewn everywhere from floor to ceiling in various states of completion and display. From drawings and paintings to homemade puppets, supplies and ideas fought for space in the small one bedroom apartment. I had never seen anyone who collected and created in such a similar way as I did. At the moment of entrance I suddenly felt as if I was not alone—that maybe my method of madness was an artistic one. His seeming chaos validated my own space. Briar was right there with me, collecting, laying out ideas, thinking in a non-linear, unorganized, mélange of creativity.

Briar's art making methods, along with his unique style of art, drew me to want to know more about his process and motivations for creating. He became an informal art teacher for me because I was drawn to his simple yet cheeky murals, cartoon character collages, and random art creations he produced around Austin and the world of found and borrowed objects. Briar's art is not solely created in his apartment but in such spaces as abandoned concrete pillars in empty overgrown lots, on tree stumps or piles of construction rubble. (His use of simple smiley and sad faces to bring to life seemingly ugly, unwanted, and unused materials became important because it changed my point of view, not only concerning Mexican American art but also when viewing it, the work positively changed my emotional state for the better.) I decided to include him in this study because I wanted to investigate this magic that stems from his ability to edgewalk and to create items outside the rules of the "artworld."

Figure 3: Briar Bonifacio and Friends. Courtesy of Briar Bonifacio.

EL KNOWLEDGE

Informal Art Communities

In order to understand the "how" and "why" of Briar Bonifacio's art, it was necessary to interview him to find out about his own background and art education. From his responses, space played an important role in his art career and his work. Briar was born in Austin in a house that would later become the famous Cathedral of Junk. He was the middle child between two sisters to parents, who between them shared Spanish, French, and Mexican heritage. He moved to a diverse south Austin neighborhood and was bussed to East Austin to attend elementary school in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood. He explains that the school was where he "got tough" and "learned to count."

Briar stated that his formal art education opportunities were few, citing only one class when he attended Crockett High School. The one class, a drama course, did however influence the direction of his career. He played the caterpillar in Alice in Wonderland (I was honored to have him sing a rendition of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star from the production during our interview). After this production he became interested in exploring the occupation of a comedian, but in the end he was too shy to pursue this art form but continued on to search out new opportunities for art participation.

Briar's mother encouraged his art career early. She herself created folk art out of pieces of wood. She would look for faces and animals in the wood and then create works from what she found. Briar sees the similarity in her art and his own. Briar's inspiration for using found objects as art subjects came from his mother as well. One of his mom's lessons was to give young Briar "nice flat rocks" to paint on when inspired. This use of everyday materials as canvasses for his art continues today.

Briar's father also worked with his hands as a tile layer. Though, despite suggestions from his son, Briar's father did not want to create artwork such as mosaics as part of his work. Briar started helping his father lay tile in the third grade. People asked him if he would be a tile setter like his dad and he would say, "No, I want to be an artist." Though Briar was not destined for the tile business, his father did involve his son in martial arts by taking Briar with him to adult classes. Briar continues his martial arts at the present day and it is evidenced in his visual art works through his creation of characters.

Over time Briar's art communities extended beyond those established by his family, and came in other informal settings. This is a reflection of our lives living separated from our natural or first communities of family, as Lippard (1997) describes in the following passage:

> Most of us are separated from organic geographical communities; even fewer can rely on blood ties. We can only hope to find created communities—people can only hope to find created communities- people who come together because they are alike on some level—or communities that are accidently formed through place, workplace, and other more artificial means. Sometimes created places, based in dissimilarity, can be more vital and less isolating than unchosen ones. But most of us live such fragmented lives and have so many minicommunities that no one knows us as a whole. The incomplete self longs for the fragments to be brought together. This cannot be done without a context, a place. (p. 25)

From the Austin police department to a "train gang" of artists he learned from "created communities" to use place to create art. For example, when he was in the eleventh grade Briar started hanging out with other skateboarders. Someone in the group was into graffiti and engaged Briar to go along and paint under various bridges in Austin. On one of the excursions the police witnessed them painting and the boys tried to run

away. The police eventually caught up with them and surprised the boys by what they did. The police said the boys could continue to paint in the space, only they just needed to be careful and not hurt themselves. The officers even invited them to do a mural on the side of the police substation. (The mural that they created for the police aptly portrayed a person stealing a TV being chased by the police.)

I jokingly said to Briar during our interview, "The police got you back into art." In a way it's true. Had Briar been caught by the officers and been fined or sent to jail for painting under the bridges, he may never have continued with his art. On the contrary, Briar continued painting murals then and still does this work today.

Briar continued his informal art education when he moved to the Ozarks to work on his grandmother's llama farm in order to save money to attend art school. By day it was his job to care for llamas but at night he was part of an informal community made of artists who painted on train cars. In fact, that was the real reason he moved to the Ozarks. His sister had been sent there to live and had met the railcar painters. Briar began painting his characters on trains and trading messages with other artists operating out of places such as California and Canada. I inquired about the goal of the artwork and he said it was to communicate with the other artists. Eventually Briar got kicked off the llama farm because he was spending all of his time painting on trains. His informal art community was so tightknit that a fellow artist's family invited Briar to live with them before he eventually moved back to Austin.

Figure 4: *Broke*. Courtesy of Briar Bonifacio.

When Briar returned home from the Ozarks he found ways to continue his train art. He said that trains don't stop in Austin because there is no train yard there. But, there is a place where there would be a layover to see another train pass by 30 minutes to an hour later. He would use spray paint and oil paint stick to complete fast works on the trains. He referred to the community as a "Train Gang" and even moved to various cities to be part of this group. He says every once in a while he still sees his art on trains going by on the Mopac train bridge. One of the Canadian artists he had been trading messages with hopped trains to find him. Briar eventually would curate art shows and he included his fellow train car artists in them. Briar even worked on a film about railroad artists and

continues to find connections with other artists working in train car art through books and exhibits.

I was struck by the purpose, longevity, and community surrounding the Train Gang art. Briar said that some art is still around on trains from the 1970s. The train gang represents a new culture where place is transient along with its art. People in the gang lived in various cities and moved from one place to another, but the culture remained. Here, Lippard (1997) describes this relationship between culture and place:

> Culture is usually understood to be what defines place and its meaning to people. But place equally defines culture….In addition, our concepts of place affect how we identify the living process within them. The degree to which places where individuals and groups interact are culturally and naturally constructed is one of the foremost debates at the end of the twentieth century. (p. 11)

Formal Art Education and Career

Briar eventually went to Austin Community College where he obtained a Certificate in Visual Communications. He sampled classes in a variety of art forms including animation, webpage design, video game programming, and video editing. He also took one painting course where the teacher taught "realistic" painting. Being familiar with Briar's artwork, I questioned his use of the lessons, asking him: How did that work out for you? And I had to laugh at Briar's response: "I never use it."

Briar's art career has been successful with a range of international shows and domestic exhibits around the United States. One of his first professional opportunities was in Austin's Gallery Lombardi. The gallery "discovered" Briar and his friends as they waited on the nearby train tracks to see their art go by and look for a friend's art. The

Lombardi Gallery invited Briar to show his art and Briar then realized that he could "be in galleries too."

Briar and his art have traveled from an exhibit of street artists in Chicago to the Deitch Gallery parade in New York City. A favorite project of mine was one he completed in Hartford, Connecticut where the city hired four different artists to work on art in public places. After visiting the city, Briar decided to place faces on the trees of Pope Park. His exploits also took place in Hong Kong where a gallery flew him to attend the opening of a group exhibit and where Briar spread his art across the city in collaboration with fellow street artists.

Today, Briar continues to work as a professional artist engaged in mural making and visual art work, though he does not reap much monetary and noticeable reward from these endeavors in Austin. Briar says that applying for gallery space is tough and takes a long time, and murals are time-intensive and provide little pay. He would like to instead move into creating children's books. Briar supplements his professional career by working at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center as he assists with events and programing. Through this endeavor he has learned more about the Mexican American culture.

Here I described both the formal and informal art educations of Mr. Briar Bonifacio. From *Sesame Street* to painting on train cars, Briar was influenced by a notion of space and community. In the following sections, I show how these ideas spark awareness and foster transculturation in my informal art education with this unique artist.

LA AWARENESS

Found Objects and Graffiti

My interest in Briar Bonifacio's works stems from his innovative use of space and found objects. In these things I found common ground with him and became aware of a shared love for collecting and repurposing objects. The following segment explores my awareness and subsequent art education of and by Briar Bonifacio.

Upon studying the work of Briar Bonifacio I soon discovered his proclivity for creating art on unsuspecting objects and in public spaces. His media range from painting on the back of rusty cake pans, to placing paint on the sides of trains and tree stumps. One of my favorite works is a smiley face that Briar painted on a large pile of demolished concrete walls and iron rods. Another is of two abandoned mattresses set up along side a wall, with Briar's signature smiley faces adorning them along with the words "relax" and "naptime." When asked where this desire to work with found objects came from he attributed it to his mother and his rock painting as a child.

Figure 5: *Nap Time and Relax*. Courtesy of Briar Bonifacio.

Figure 6: *Cement Boots Brothers*. Courtesy of Briar Bonifacio.

I also work on found objects. Seeing another artist who collects and uses otherwise unwanted materials helps to validate my work and also inspires me to find new things to use and reuse. Briar creates work from existing structures such as utility boxes and abandoned materials. Discovering his work as I traverse various neighborhoods in Austin is like going on a treasure hunt. The whimsical nature and unexpectedness of his efforts generate happiness in me and I suspect in many of the people who pass by the unanticipated works. This experience speaks to my awareness of the magic of art to change the emotional state of its viewers.

I also connect with Briar's respect of space. He distinguishes his work from graffiti saying that he only paints on things that no one wants/uses, whereas graffiti artists paint on spaces that are in use, such as on the sides of restaurants. Briar even goes so far as to say that he worked to clear away graffiti from public spaces and occasionally chases

taggers. While Briar is friends with many graffiti artists, he believes them and their art to be "ridiculous." During our interview we commiserated about graffiti "punk kids" and I shared my story of catching someone tagging a store near my house (disappointingly, they got away with tagging the building before I could stop them).

The interview with Briar helped me to become aware of the respect that I also hold for other's space and of material goods. Both Briar and I value reusing and repurposing materials and that is evident in our artwork and speaks to the role of artists working within a specific environment.

LA TRANSCULTURATION

In addition to sparking awareness about my art and use of space, Briar's art and our interview helped add to the process of my transculturation. Through observing his use of space, and learning from him about his motivations for work and his edgewalking as a modern artist defying stereotypes, I found myself moving beyond my own culture to meet him in the "third landscape," where cultures, aesthetics, and identities come together to create something new.

Returning to Our Youth

In both my own work and that of Briar, I find that we recreate ideas and images from our youth and past experiences over and over again. This approach to art making is seen in the following quote from Diana Taylor (2003) concerning performances (in which I include creating visual art) and the use of the repertoire and archive:

> Performances also replicate themselves through their own structures and codes. This means that the repertoire, like the archive, is mediated. The process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission takes place within (and in turn helps constitute specific systems of re-presentation. Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. (pp. 20-21)

Briar's archive, as detailed in this chapter, was greatly influenced by children's media such as *Sesame Street* and Dr. Seuss. The "constant state of againness," like in performances, is demonstrated in Briar's work. His use of cartoon characters and smiley faces speaks to a childlike aesthetic. Proof of this connection to his 'mediated archive and repertoire' exists in a comment in our interview where he recounts finding pictures of artwork that he did when he was a child. He says that the artwork displayed cats, trees, and smiling suns, many of the characters seen in his adult and professional art. He stated that the work from his past was very much like the work he presently creates. I saw this connection as well in my musing during our interview, "Whereas the drawings themselves may not have changed that much, how you use them is different…." For example, he also wants to return to his influences of children's books by creating his own. One of his individuals is "Eddie Torres," a character, invented by actor Cheech Marin, with a striking resemblance to another "E.T." This "tough love educator" all "tatted (tattooed) up" will "scare you straight with his stories" Like most of his work, Briar wants his books to speak to both kids and adults alike.

Figure 7: *Eddie Torrez, Mellow, & Stray Cat*. Courtesy of Briar Bonifacio.

I connected with Briar on this level of creating and seeing recurring themes and ideas in what we do. I consistently use a symbol of a casita, or a little house, in my drawings. The house represents many of my past experiences and captures parts of my edgewalking self. My name in the diminutive form in Spanish is Casita, and sprang from my time in Mexico as a nickname that my Mexican friends gave me. I include also my initials CLS in the work, however I use the Chicano style of abbreviating Con Safos c/s for the characters. This term, which loosely translated to mean "with respect," was used by Mexican American graffiti artists during the Chicano Movement (and still today) to discourage opposing groups from tagging or destroying their public artwork. I incorporated this into my signature "Casita" to not only show my connections with the Mexican American community but to simultaneously keep my identity as Cassie Lynn

Smith. The childlike nature of the hand-drawn house with a sun or a tree (it varies from drawing to drawing) shows how though the work is used differently it still recalls the beginnings of my art career.

Motivations

> The Mexico/United States border *is* a site where many different cultures "touch" each other and the permeable, flexible, and ambiguous shifting grounds lend themselves to hybrid images. The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating new assemblage. Border artists *cambian el punto de referencia*. By disrupting the neat separations between cultures, they create a culture mix, una mestizada in their artworks. Each artist locates her/himself in this border *"lugar,"* and tears apart and rebuilds the "place" itself. (Anzuldúa, 1993, p. 107)

Briar's work first drew my attention because it changed my "punto de referencia" or point of reference. Some art makes me think or analyze or want to investigate a new technique; his simple drawings always make me smile. He says that this is his goal—to make people happy, which is different from the missions of many other artists I have encountered. In fact, my interview with Briar supports his mission as I laughed throughout the interview and over and over again as I wrote this chapter.

El Edgewalker

> Cultural geographer Don Mitchell suggests that we tend to say "culture" when we're not sure what we're talking about, because any consensus on social relations is always contested and always changing. Since the eighties, culture has become a euphemism for race and ethnic background, a key word in the identity politics that has crossed the tracks into academic parts of town. (The danger here is of fencing in with cultural preconceptions, using the term to explain away things we don't understand—"it's just our/their culture…"). (Lippard, 1997, p. 11)

Bonifacio's heritage is part French, part Spanish, and part Mexican. However, this ethnic diversity does not play a significant role in his art. He creates what makes him happy and what he hopes will do the same for others. He speaks of a time when a local museum wanted to select a print of his art to sell in their shop. The director desired something "Mexican," and Briar recalls his reaction that "I'm Mexican. It comes from my hand so it's Mexican." Another time he tried to make something to match what the museum wanted (i.e., "something Mexican") and he ended up hating what he painted, going against his own motivations and personal aesthetic. He is an edgewalker this way, defying stereotypes of what "Mexican" or Mexican American art should be, and simply says that it is "mostly what I want to do."

I choose Briar as a collaborator in this work because of his divergence from Mexican Art. In the same way that I often chose to participate or create things outside my cultural heritage or the stereotype of what an "anglo" should be, Briar chooses to create what makes him happy, and that encourages me to do the same.

LA CONCLUSION

> *Today I rode my bike to Barton Springs. Coming home, I passed under the railroad tracks around South Lamar Street. I glanced up at the sound of a train passing by and quickly slowed down to see if I could see any art gracing the sides of the cars. A few images flashed by along with some words, too quickly passing to really see but I new there were messages, motives, meaning in those lines…*

The most important things I learned from Briar Bonifacio were not about technique or selling art, but rather how to stay true to my own nature and to create art in new places

and in innovative ways. I became aware of myself and how to use art to bridge worlds through simple drawings and clever use of materials and space to inspire an audience.

Briar qualified as an edgewalker based on his comfort for living and working with various cultural groups. Beginning with his diverse heritage, to his various artist groups such as his train gang and childhood artists, he identified living across borders. Briar works in mainstream culture, as well as with groups within his third landscape, by showing his work in public and museum spaces. He is successful at moving between these groups while retaining his own values and unique personality, as seen in his work while being able to connect with people from other groups. We see this in his motivations for creating art—to make all people happy.

Briar's work and interactions with me qualify as an informal form of art education. His work is public and easily accessible to me. There is a dialogue between Briar's work and the artist himself. This occurs not only through this interview but within dozens of previous conversations as well as the availability of his art through the city in various outdoor and museum locations. The take away from Briar's work is often times mood changing—his art makes the viewer laugh and ponder the simplicity in its message. The work is communicated though cartoonlike childish characters that appeal to a diverse audience.

Briar's work has been added to the collective consciousness by public viewing as well as work that has been collected, displayed, and sold by museums such as Mexic-Arte, the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, and the Serie Print Project. His addition to the archive of Mexican American art is important because it

defies the stereotype of what it means to create Chicano art. My art education was on the whole unintentional. Briar would simply be himself when I asked him questions about his art and/or process of creating it.

Briar initiated a new perspective for me in the creation and sharing of his art. Much like Gloria Azuldúa's (1993) observation in the following selection concerning an exhibit of indigenous Mexican art, Briar's world presents an alternative perspective for his viewers:

> Finally, I find myself before the reconstructed statue of the newly unearthed *el dios murciélago*, the bat god with his big ears, fangs, and protruding tongue, representing the vampire bat associated with night, blood, sacrifice, and death. I make an instantaneous association of the bat man with the *neplantla* stage of border artists—the dark cave of creativity where they hang upside down, turning the self upside down in order to see from another point of view, one that brings a new state of understanding. (p. 113)

This new state of understanding brought on by Briar began the moment I first saw his work and encountered his studio space. It has continued throughout our friendship. The interview enabled me to explore even more thoroughly my informal art education and how Briar's existence between aesthetic, cultural, and spatial motives opens up an alternative space for me to create and present my own work.

Chapter 5: La Curator

LA INTRODUCITON

I want to do a lot of things and I'm going to do all of them cause I want to. I'm going to. I have the capacity to. And I know that there is talent out there that needs to showcased or talked about. - Claudia Zapata

Claudia Zapata is an art historian, curator, art entrepreneur, and visual artist who has been an integral part of my art education. As seen in the opening quote to this section, one of Claudia's most effective qualities is her persistence and motivation. Aided by these attributes, she taught me the importance of identity and innovation in the arts. I interviewed Claudia at her home in Austin, Texas on December 9, 2012 in order to learn more of her process for arriving as one of the most called on Chicano art innovators in Austin. Claudia's quotes made in this thesis are from my interview with her, unless specifically referenced.

The first time I pitched my ideas for this thesis to her she questioned my assumptions, as edgewalkers do. She doubted the word "edgewalker" itself, saying that having an "edge" denoted a border whereas her experience as a Mexican American was more fluid and changing rather than possessing a strict border. I was curious to know more about Claudia, the questioning intellectual, the artist, and the curator. The following pages describe how my curiosity led me to find out more about Claudia and her roots in art and art education.

LA CURIOSITY

When I heard Mexic-Arte had a new Education Coordinator I naturally had to introduce myself. Being a student of Art Education with special interests in community and Mexican American art, I was curious to know how this new Education Coordinator would proceed. The new Coordinator was Claudia Zapata, a native Texan, and burgeoning force in the Mexican American art scene in Austin.

After that first meeting Claudia kept popping up in project after project, a gallery opening here, a platica there. I was encouraged by her presence and participation in the community outside the museum, and I began to follow her work. Such has been our relationship ever since. Claudia not only inspires me with her innovative approach to identity and process of disseminating art, but also in her willingness to mentor and support me and my own work. Her encouragement not only of me, but also of many others in the art community, is part of her art education of creating space for what's missing in the archive and bringing the many faces of border consciousness to the forefront of community based art education.

EL KNOWLEDGE

Although we had been acquaintances for a couple years, upon compiling the questions for Claudia's interview I realized that I did not know much about her background. I reveal here what I learned about her upbringing, formal and informal education, and her work in the Mexican American art community in Texas. The

knowledge gained here enables a greater understanding of Claudia's effectiveness in being an edgewalker and informal art educator.

La Familia

Claudia was born in Waco, Texas, but she and her family moved around to accommodate her father's job. They soon moved to Austin, Harlingen, and finally settled San Antonio. Each of the cities was very different from one another and Claudia became aware of the presence and/or lack of Latinos where she lived. In Austin, where she lived from one to eight years of age, she noted that there were fewer Latinos. Though her consciousness about race was not yet thoroughly developed, she recalls one instance when a white child said: "You are Mexican." While the two children were not fighting, he was distinguishing himself from her. In Harlingen, she was aware that there were more Latinos. However, there, she encountered a "polarizing" and "negative" attitude about race on the border. In San Antonio, where Claudia finally landed after her parents' divorce in middle school, she found that there was a place where Latinos abounded and who were also very proud of their Mexican heritage.

Figure 8: *Young Claudia Zapata*. Photo Courtsey of Claudia Zapata.

Her mother was quite proud of her Mexican heritage as well. She worked to promote Latino culture in the classroom. Her mother, a teacher with a career spanning elementary to college level classrooms, was very active keeping up on politics and learning new languages. Her mother is well educated with undergraduate and graduate degrees from The University of Texas. Her mother took part in the Chicano movement. Even after the marches and walkouts were over she thought she was still on "the front lines" as a teacher of Mexican American children. Claudia cites her mother as a mentor and great influence in her life.

Her father was a Texas State Trooper while she was growing up. Although he had training as a draftsman and showed promise, his parents, according to Claudia, did not

encourage those skills. Instead, he graduated from The University of Texas in political science, became a Marine, went on to be a state trooper and detective. Claudia attributed this to a disadvantaged upbringing and she believes that if he had the opportunity he may have gone into a creative career.

La Early Education

In San Antonio she and her mother and sister lived in a lower middle class neighborhood that was "somewhat dangerous." Claudia comments that she was always alone as her mom was working. Her middle school was known for students getting into fights, and Claudia herself was always in trouble. She says that this was not a great learning environment. Outside of school Claudia would hang out with the neighborhood "Chicano boys" and the skater crowd, but she had no outlet for the intellectual conversations she wanted.

In middle and high school in San Antonio, Claudia learned to hide her intelligence. She says that one "didn't fare well" if you were a "nerd." So she kept her comments to herself (Claudia later struggled with this when she started graduate where you were expected to participate). In middle school she refers to the students as "hardcore kids" and she learned not to talk in class because if she did she would become a "target" for her classmates. Claudia got in trouble a lot in high school, spending time in detention and being suspended from school.

Claudia stated that she was an "alternative kid" and that: "Public school education just doesn't get kids like me. I'm an anomaly." She was also aware that it (formal

education) "wasn't working." Claudia talks about being different from the others even at a very young age. She was a loner always on her own "reflecting" about the world and even made herself go outside when it was cold in order to "understand nature." She was "always looking," "reflecting," "abstracting of this reality." She told one story about getting into trouble for reading *Little Women* in economics class—an example of making up for the deficits she consistently encountered in her formal education.

Her frustration with school made her "rebellious, angry, and detached." From a very young age she began self-educating to make up the restrictions she faced in school. She joked about the fact that she was the kind of kid who checked out the maximum number of books from the library at a time. She was also upset by the lack of information about Mexicans and Latinos taught in the classroom, noting that they were not "included in the dialogue of history." In the following passage Lipsitz (2006) speaks to this "systemic miseducation" not only in schools but also in the American media and public sphere:

> I point to these omissions, in part, because I have been an accomplice to them. As a non-Chicano scholar conducting research in Cultural Studies, I have only gradually become aware of my own ignorance about Chicana/o culture, partly as a result of the systemic miseducation I have been subjected to by schools, the media, the publishing industry, and partly by my own limits as a citizen, linguist, and scholar. (p. 49)

Claudia had a diverse geographic and educational upbringing. However, in this she never really felt as if she was getting the best education possible. From Austin, to Harlingen, and San Antonio she searched for an outlet for her creativity and intellectual side that she did not find in school.

EL Art Education

While Claudia did not find public education a conducive space for learning, she actively searched for opportunities outside of school. Claudia states that she was "one of those kids who needed to be entertained to stay out of trouble." Claudia's mother recognized this and kept her daughter busy. She was in band and her mother enrolled her in Baile folklórico (even at the time Claudia was uncomfortable being separated by gender to perform). This early awareness of art also took many other forms including sketching and painting, photography, and video. Though her mother was not always present, she always gave Claudia the tools to engage in arts activities.

Claudia says that she "never really liked school" and points out that her sexual orientation also made it difficult for her: "I was queer and that was weird." One art teacher suggested that art would be a good field for Claudia and she agreed because the arts "captured a lot of disciplines in one," including history and "abstract thinking." She joined the Art Decathlon team where members would compete by analyzing art. Claudia enjoyed engaging with art and finding meaning and context beyond the aesthetic. She claims that one of her first memorable art experiences was investigating and "searching" in her mother's bathroom for treasures and finding an image by Picasso. She was drawn to the abstractness of the object.

Museums were also a large part of Claudia's informal art education in San Antonio and abroad. She says that the art and community events in San Antonio were her childhood's saving grace. Claudia did a lot of traveling, including trips to Europe and

studying abroad in Argentina and Venezuela in high school. Her experiences helped to increase her personal and cultural awareness. She changed a view of what she wanted to do with her life, and the travel helped Claudia put into perspective bigger issues than those considered by most typical high school students. While abroad she had more time to think about serious issues. These became "pivotal moments" for her and for her art.

Claudia was also influenced by her mentors at The University of Texas where she completed both her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Art History. These professors included Dr. Guernsey, an art historian, who fostered her interest in Pre Colombian art. Another professor, Dr. Lopez, taught a course on Chicano/Latino sexuality, which helped Claudia with the struggles of being a person of color in college, especially with coming to a place where you "don't fit in." Her most recent mentor is Sylvia Orozco, director of Mexic-Arte Museum, where she did an internship in graduate school and currently works as a full time Curator of Exhibitions and Programs.

Claudia was contemplating leaving Austin upon graduation until Sylvia suggested that she should work at Mexic-Arte. Sylvia was prepared to make this employment happen, though there was not an open position, saying: "We will write a grant for your job." At Mexic-Arte she flourished first as the Education Coordinator and then Curator. As an intern she researched an exhibit called: "Aztec and Maya Revival." And this exhibit led her to curate the Young Latino Artists Show 15. Currently, Claudia is asked to curate shows and sit on panels at events around town, especially things pertaining to her particular interests and identity, including museums, Queerness, Chicano, Latino, and Pre-Columbian art. It has been the consistency of projects that kept her in Austin.

Claudia, though not thoroughly engaged in her public education, found a place for her to learn and belong outside and beyond middle and high school. From doing her own artwork, to visiting museums and new countries, she explored her identity and creativity in alternative informal learning spaces. College and her mentors supported Claudia through this process and helped her to find her current career, sharing what she has learned through other informal means.

LA AWARENESS

> The struggle is inner: Chicano, *indio* American Indian, *mojado, mexicano*, immigrant, Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the "real world" unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (Anzuldúa, 1987, p. 109)

In this statement, Gloria Anzuldúa describes how the "bordertowns" of our psyches hold the key to our affecting changed in the world. We must first become aware of our personal identity struggles before tackling the surrounding societal problems. As described above, Claudia Zapata encountered times in her life that facilitated her inner knowledge of race, identity, and gender. In our own relationship, I found that Claudia's awareness aided me in exploring my own consciousness. The subsequent section describes her exploration of identity and using the process to help others do the same through her work.

El Identity and La Racism

African American author E. Patrick Johnson (2010) argues in his article "Border Intellectual: Performing at the Crossroads" that a person's social and cultural environment affects their epistemology and how they see themselves and the world. The author came to know himself and the world "through the lens of the small, segregated southern town in which I grew up" (p. 148). Claudia came into her place of knowing through her Mexican American lens: "Everything we do is Mexican and American. We coexist." She goes on to say that: "Even now its very difficult being Mexican American or Chicano because there is still that in between—(you are) never really American you're never really Mexican." She says that she struggles to overcome Mexican American stereotypes such as speaking Spanish and drinking tequila. She works to change stereotypes and teach others to do the same.

Despite Austin's image as being inclusive, Claudia has experienced significant racism in the city. She is very emphatic about this and makes a point of saying it several times in our interview. She states that it exists everywhere in public venues, in the schools, and even in the art community. The common narrative that Austin is "weird" and thus, accepting, would have one think that people here who are different, i.e. queer, of a different color etc. would be accepted. However, there are other narratives, many historical, that work against this. Lipsitz (2006) describes these narratives well: "People not only inhabit a common geographic territory when they live in a nation, but they are also hailed by a common narrative that serves the interests of power to the extent that it conceals real antagonisms and divisions" (p. 50).

Claudia has learned these "common narratives" and as such has associations with particular situations and places:

> You don't feel comfortable in certain spaces in Austin. I don't feel comfortable when it's like when I am the only Latino in the restaurant. It doesn't make me feel comfortable. It doesn't make me feel comfortable when people don't think that I speak English or they don't think I'm the curator.

Claudia states that because of her identity, being Latino and queer, these assumptions frequently occur. She goes on to talk about the segregation of the city. From the bars to art museums, she says that there is "no in between for us" and that places are geographically segregated into black, brown, or white.

Of particular interest to Claudia is the fact that Chicanos do not have enough presence in professional and social art spaces. She comments that an administrator of an Austin museum once told her, "We don't really do Latino art here," indicating that that type of art is shown at other venues including the ESB MACC, Mexic-Arte, or the Blanton. Although, even at the Blanton, Latin American contemporary art is shown but there is little or no Chicano art exhibited there. Claudia believes that they have the misconception that Chicano art is only "lowriders" and "cholos."

In addition to her ethnic identity, Claudia also has to face marginalization due to her sexual orientation, which adds another layer and another border for her to cross: "It's one thing to be Latino, one thing to be Chicano, it's one thing to be poor but it's another thing to be queer while all of that is going on." Johnson (2010) comments on his own search for "wholeness": "Queerness was beyond the boundaries of authentic blackness.

Thus, the sense of belonging that I once felt about being "home" was undercut by a longing to cross yet another border in a search for wholeness" (p. 150).

Despite the dividing lines, Claudia claims that Austin represents half or more of her identity. She, like many, have learned to navigate her cultural landscape as seen here in a quote from Johnson (2010): "Given the context of this segregated landscape, blacks in Hickory—my family included—learned to negotiate the different border crossings demanded of us, which also shaped our conceptions of race and class" (p.148). Claudia learned to negotiate the border crossing and she now challenges them. She struggles to deal with racism to get her projects out there and to promote fellow Chicano and Latino Artists.

Process and Participation

This awareness of identity in Claudia is seen in her work. She uses her process to create and engage in projects that help to showcase various Chicano and Latino aesthetics. When curating an exhibition, she considers this along with the technical process of installation—availability of work, theme, programing, time space project. She expresses the importance of curators and historians creating art so you know how to analyze and understand the artistic processes:

> Truth in the reality… acknowledge this beyond the aesthetic. It can't be just that this "looks pretty." It has to be: "This looks pretty because?" We're producing this because? What is this specific Latino experience? Why are we creating this as Latinos? Why are we defining ourselves as Latinos? Is this important? Is this necessary? Who's not doing it? Why are they not doing it? What are they benefiting not doing it? Why is this dialogue important? Why is this relevant? How is it changing? How is it geographically specific? How is it generationally specific?

Claudia is constantly questioning the status quo and reasons behind art, culture, politics, etc. She encourages others to ask similar questions.

Because of her personal motivations, she put much of herself into her work. She considers it her responsibility to work for Chicano and Latino artists to be part of the narrative and archive and says: "It's a lot of weight" for the new generation of Chicanos to establish what will be next for the community. She is continuously asking what she is doing to further Latino/Chicano art. Claudia uses her process and her need to stay busy to help promote Chicano art and artists. She does this often through collaborations with other artists, organizations, and museums.

Claudia shares her knowledge and consciousness educating about identity and equality and questioning the complacency with the status quo. She affirms that: "We are gonna do it and do it well and we will tell others about how well we did it." She says that many in the Latino art community are humble and do not promote their own art as they should. She speaks to the importance of recognizing that things can change, "acknowledging that things can get better." She also works toward empowerment and agency through her own work and with her collaborators, saying that we "have to include ourselves" and bring it into the public eye by talking about it.

One instance of how she did this was when she wanted to bridge the gap between the San Antonio and Austin art worlds. She proposed a project called "South by San Anto," an art event during Austin's famous music festival South by Southwest, designed to bring San Antonio Latino artists to Austin. And they came—Chis Davila rented a van

and transformed it into a mobile gallery where artists could showcase and sell their art. Claudia assisted them with logistics in Austin by directing them to parking lots where they could set up, and partnering them with other artists.

Claudia also worked on the Uprooted Dreams project directed by Mexican and American artist Margarita Cabrera, mentioned earlier in this thesis. Uprooted Dreams consisted of an interdisciplinary project to facilitate dialogue about gentrification through art. The students not only learned to create their carvings but they also grew together as a group, shared their experiences, and it turned in to a therapeutic art residency concerning the borders placed on them in Austin.

Cabrera approached Claudia about writing a section for the book that would accompany the project. Claudia wrote an introduction for the work where she provides the context for the gentrification and subsequent borders created by political, social, and economic motives. Here, she describes the movement and results of this process:

> Some people move about quite freely, at their own convenience and opportunity; others are much more highly restricted and are moved not by their own wish or need but by forces far out of their control. The result: a radical privileging of both the occupation of spaces and the movement between them. Boundaries, in all forms, are built where note existed previously; individuals and families see the spaces of their true and valued homes made unwelcoming; people's lives become disrupted, displaced, and uprooted. (Zapata, 2012, p. 8)

Claudia uses her work to address needs within the community and to make space for alternative landscapes and consciousness. She started her own art collective to help fill this void. Claudia, along with Claudia Aparicio-Gamundi and James Huizar, created the Puro Chingon Collective. The mission of the Puro Chingon Collective follows:

> The Puro Chingon Collective is a creative trifecta specializing in happenings, the activation of nontraditional spaces, and art zines. From individual, humble beginnings, this Austin creative crew formed in 2012 to serve the community and produce the art everyone never knew they always wanted. (ChingoZine About, 2013)

One of their first projects was for the Workers Defense Project, an organization created to support low-income workers with educational, organizational, and other services. They hosted an event honoring activists Linda Chavez Thompson, Cristina Tzintzún and Dolorous Huerta—a founding member of the United Farm Workers and champion for civil rights. Claudia saw this as a chance to engage with the community and be part of history. Though the members of her collective were unsure of, "Doing a thing for free for a person they didn't know," Claudia taught them the significance of the activist and the event. They not only created a commemorative print but also volunteered at the event.

Claudia is very aware of herself and the world wherein which she lives. As evidenced in our interview together, Claudia uses this awareness to educate and support others. Through her willingness to promote Chicano/Latino causes she found the opportunity to work with renowned artist Margaritas Cabrera and to meet activist Dolorous Huerta. Claudia is living the "nerd's dream," according to her, and she continues her productive career. Claudia claims that she rarely says no to new projects. Instead she is involved and spreading awareness to others.

LA TRANSCULTURATION

I have learned from Claudia Zapata that if the space for your projects does not exist you must create it. She works to establish a third landscape where her border consciousness and that of her colleagues can express themselves. This is a trait seen in all the edgewalkers of this study, not only creating a space but also new ways of talking about identity, as we see here and supported by Gomez-Peña (1989):

> These are the challenges of a new generation of artists and cultural activists: to redesign our continental map, to rebaptize it in our own terms, and to express it in completely new ways. We must invent new languages capable of articulating our unique circumstances. Nationalism, provincialism, political/aesthetic conservatism and ethnic resentments are but a few of the tremendous number of obstacles we have to sort out before ewe can find the real shape of the continent's consciousness. (p. 117)

In the following section I describe how Claudia uses her work to transcend her own culture and connect with others and overcome the obstacles standing in the way of transculturation.

Día de los Muertos

One of my forays into transculturation through art is Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. This is a holiday originally celebrated by Mexico's indigenous peoples and now honored throughout Mexico and the United States. It is said that Día de los Muertos is the day when the dead can come back to the world of the living. Family members and friends build altars with gifts and tools for the journey of their lost loved ones. Claudia curated the 2011 and 2012 exhibit of altars at Mexic-Arte Museum and uses this as a chance to move beyond the traditional customs to a postmodern collection. Frustrated with how Latino culture has been appropriated for "culture collecting mentality" and

"image colonization," she used Día de los Muertos as an example saying everyone wants to see "cultural porn" typically associated with the holiday, including marigolds and Calaveras. However, she says that the Mexican community has seen that before and with the Día de los Muertos exhibits she wanted to move into something more innovative and conceptual. In Claudia's attempt to shift away from the traditional and appropriated culture, she also worked to resist being stereotyped and to take back the meaning of the day as supported by Lipsitz (2006):

> Questions of culture are also questions of politics. Struggles over meaning are ultimately struggles over resources, because they help determine what is permitted and what is forbidden, who is included and who is excluded, who speaks and who is silenced. (p. 48)

Claudia used the 2012 exhibit Elements of Death and Community Altars to create a learning experience to take visitors back to explore the original purpose of Día de los Muertos. She asked members of the community to create altars to loved ones they had lost. She worked with ALLGO, the Austin Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Organization, to raise awareness about violence against homosexuals. They created an altar dedicated to a woman who was murdered by her girlfriend's father. She also asked the friends of a slain college student to create an altar for their friend. She broke the mold for understanding and making the traditional altars and took a risk inviting people she did not know to create the work. Some of them do not know the original meaning of Día de los Muertos and had never visited Mexic-Arte. She created a new space for them to learn and to remember their loved ones, at the same time teaching the community about difficult issues.

With the 2012 exhibit, Claudia wanted to experiment and give the artists room to do something new. She enjoys seeing how the exhibits change and become interactive installations that are a "pedagogical tool for Latino culture" and an "alternative site of memory." When visiting the exhibit and other altar displays I am drawn to explore feelings of nostalgia and the shared experience of loss. In the case of "Elements of Death and Community Altars," the viewers were exposed to themes they may not have been personally familiar with, including homosexuality and senseless violence and death. While these may have seemed like foreign subjects to some, the altar makers had firsthand experience that they could transfer to the visitors. Lipsitz (2006) presents this reorientation of information: "Yet what might seem "marginal" to members of the dominant culture is the 'center' to someone else" (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 48).

Claudia's careful selections for this exhibit helped to bring the dominant culture to the "center." Viewers may not have known the person memorialized but they feel/mourn when they see/experience the altars. In this way the visitors were part of a choreographed exhibit that facilitated transculturation, or cultural connections beyond one's own culture.

ChingoZine

Claudia can be also known for aiding the process of transculturation by bringing her own culture to the public eye. Most notable of her innovations is the creation of ChingoZine with her Puro Chingon Collective. She and her co-workers at Mexic-Arte

came up with the idea of a Latino zine, or a homemade publication that would feature emerging Latino Artists. In the Collective's own words:

> ChingoZine is a biannual zine featuring the original drawings, design, and print work of emerging Latino artists. In Spanish "Chingo" is a slang term for "lots of" or a "plethora of". Zine is an abbreviated form of "magazine" and is typically a low-cost publication distributed to members of alternative, counter, and subcultures. Through a zine format, ChingoZine aims to create an accessible and affordable art publication that will be circulated online and in print. (What is ChingoZine, 2013)

Claudia is one of the founders, the editor, and a contributing artist to the zine. She wanted to create a place for artists to display works that did not have a presence in traditional art spaces. She was inspired by the black and white sketchbook drawings of her fellow artists and that is much of what is found in the zine. She extols them saying that they are "hidden gems." She takes the ordinary musings of artists and makes them public.

Like in most of what Claudia does with her work, she incorporates a message in the curating of ChingoZine. The images she selects for the zine are deliberate to make sure the images talk to each other and that the large series tells the story. Each of the works must fit the dialogue while also being "punchy" and "bold" and "strong enough to hold a page by themself."

The first zine was released in April 2012 after a production time that took one month. The collective organizes a release party for each of the publications. Each of the events matched the theme of the zine with coordinating ChingoZine cholas, piñatas, and taco trucks, where needed.

Figure 9: *ChingoZine 1: Cover*. Created by Mark Aguilar, Claudia Aparicio-Gamundi and James Huizar for *ChingoZine 1, 2012*.

The Zine has reached a level of transculturation on its own. It as been archived in many collections where it is often times the first of its kind. It can be found in the People of Color Zine Project, in the Barnard Zine Library at Texas A&M University, and in the Austin History Center. (Gloria Espitia pondered at where exactly to archive it... Is it a publication? It is too small for circulation…it was eventually classified finally and as a zine—possible the first one in AHC archive). ChingoZine can also be found in stores and at various events around Austin. The zine is truly for the inhabitants of the third landscape with its low-rider cover and intercultural references. Claudia and her collective created a new avenue for Latino artists to show their work and embrace their multiple cultural identities.

Figure 10: *Mapache Bear*. Created by Claudia Zapata for *ChingoZine 2*: *Chingos of Death*, 2012.

LA CONCLUSION

Claudia Zapata is a producer that refuses to accept mainstream stereotypes. She creates space and validation for artists and art educators such as myself. This chapter described the process of transculturation including my curiosity with Claudia's work, to learning more about her background, to seeing her awareness and my own through her projects, and finally the process of connecting and participating in another culture.

As an edgewalker, Claudia constantly traverses among different worlds, including Mexican, American, queer, artist, curator, and activist. She identifies with these groups but at the same time she has made a place for herself in mainstream Austin. She does this while maintaining her own unique identity. She is adept at talking about this mobility and including the dialogue within her art and her projects. She uses her own personal experience to help understand others, and works to bring out the best in her fellow artists.

My informal art education was greatly enhanced by getting to know Claudia and her work. Her expressions are public, existing in exhibits, Zines, murals, prints and in many more spaces. As a curator, she implements a dialogue between her work and that of the viewer, which often times includes intentional themes and ideas for the visitor to take away with them. Her work adds an important new medium to the Mexican American art archive because of the innovative spaces and projects that she produces along with her unique identity.

Chapter 6: El Bailarín

LA INTRODUCTION

I'm sitting in a folding chair on the rafters at the Santa Cruz Cultural Center. Arriving a bit early for the interview enables me to witness artistic process in action. Choreographer, dancers, and traditional Mexican music fills the small theaters along with the constant heartbeat of the zapateado being pounded out by the dancers' heels. The sounds of 7th Street drift in through the open door and set the stage for the barrio dance of ripped leotards, lithe movements, and the rhythm of Son Jarocho punctuated by the director's instructions and movements.

The dance troupe is the Aztlán Dance Company and they are preparing for their upcoming show Loterialandia—an homage to the Mexican Lotería characters. I feel fortunate to witness the behind-the-scenes construction of the dance and the after practice conversation. All this set the perfect stage for my interview with Roén Salinas, Artist/Vision Director and Choreographer of the troupe.

I interviewed Roén Salinas on May 9, 2013 at the Santa Cruz Center for Culture in Austin, Texas. My conversations discussed in this chapter are from that day unless otherwise referenced. The following pages outline my curiosity for Roén and his work, knowledge of Roén's personal and artistic history, the awareness generated by the company and Roén's work, and finally it explores the culminating process of transculturation within my own and Roén's experience.

LA CURIOSITY

The first time I saw the Aztlán Dance Company perform their moves took my breath away and sparked my imagination. I attended the show as a volunteer for The

Long Center for the Performing Arts in August 2009. The show was the *Land of the Feathered Serpent* and was produced in celebration of the Aztlán Dance Company's 35th anniversary. My interpretation of the show was that of the telling of Mexican history through dance and music from indigenous beats, to the Spanish influenced Spanish guitar, to more modern cumbias. I was drawn in by the inclusion of so many dance forms within one work and the embodied story or origins, conquest, and hybridity that was woven into the movements of the dancers.

After that performance I kept track of the dance group and attended as many performances as possible. These shows included cumbia dancing luchadores in Aztlán-*Contra-Danza: El Gran Lucha Libre,* a border crossing show with Cantinflas reincarnated in *Enchilada Western*, and a time traveling crew of dancers in *Sexto Sol: A Cumbia Cruiser's Guide to the Galaxy*. Eventually I would come to know Roén Salinas, the Artists/Vision Director and choreographer, and many of the dancers. My curiosity came from the group's ability to put into dance the various cultural complexities of the Mexican American experience in an entertaining and thought-provoking manner that drew in audiences of varied backgrounds and interests. Their blending not only of musical rhythms but also of cultures, including ones with indigenous, Mexican, American and Austin roots, created a performance like no other and beckoned me to learn more.

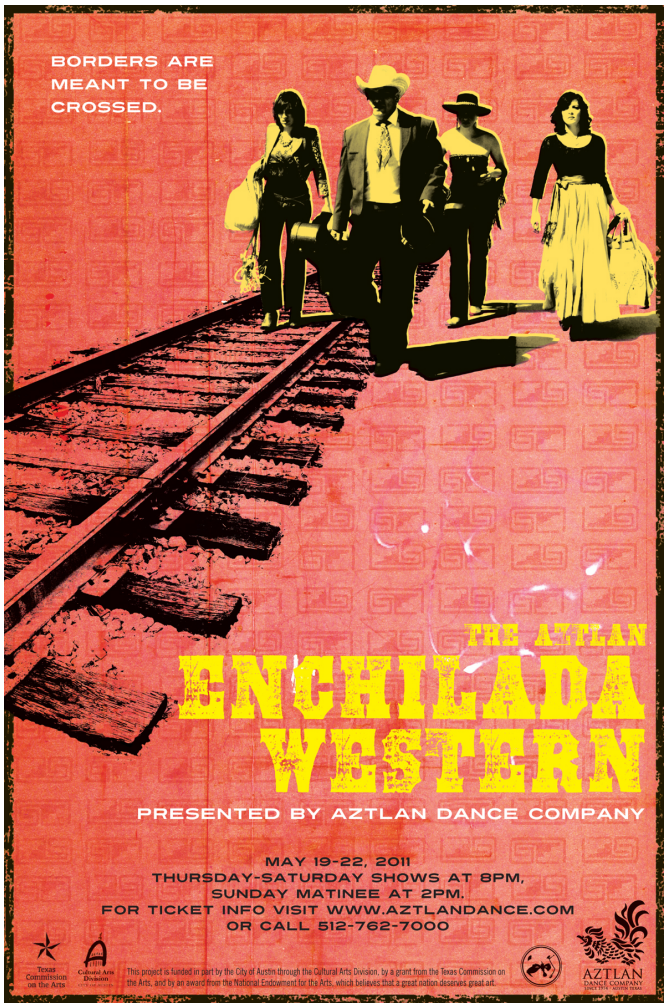

Figure 11: Advertisement for *Enchilada Western*. Courtesy of Aztlán Dance Company.

EL KNOWLEDGE

Community Based Art Education

My curiosity and interest, sparked by the innovative dances of Aztlán, urged me to find out about this group and its history. I interviewed Roén Salinas who has been with the company since its beginning. It was his mother who founded the company after the family moved from Waco to Austin when Roén was just three months old. His mother

created the Aztlán dance company to fill a void in the arts programming available to her children and that of the East Side neighborhood, which was predominantly Mexican American. The company would work in the community for the next forty years and is currently still creating shows.

Roén's mother participated in dance when she was young and wanted to provide this experience for her children. She started the company in the mid to late 1960s, amidst activity and events of the Chicano movement. Roén said that at that time Austin was a small community with emphasis on the musical arts. (Roén started with music as well but he could not imagine it without attaching movement). However, the opportunities for visual and performing arts were not as prevalent then.

The dance troupe was very involved in the community and held practices and shows in various community centers including the Pan Am Recreation Center and Juarez Lincoln University. In these locations the activities and arts created an organic atmosphere and places where society and culture come together. Roén spoke a lot about his time at Juarez Lincoln University in particular. In 1975, the institution of higher learning moved its campus just west of IH 35, near the Mexican American neighborhood in East Austin. The university offered students low tuition, scholarships, and grants for students who could not afford to attend. The University focused its methods of learning on Mexican American Youth Organization Alternative Education Model, which centered on bilingualism and biculturalism. In this model the school was not separate from the community (García, n.d.).

In fact, Roén speaks to his time at Juarez Lincoln as a child as one of his most valuable collaborations. He recalls practices with Aztlán where they were dancing along side the academics and visual artists. He says that individuals and groups there were studying each other and learning one from another. There he would encounter many of his mentors, including activists, artists, and arts activists. The League of the United Chicano Artists organization met there and was very influential in planting the seed for Roén's activism. Members of this organization included J.P Gutierrez, Amado Pena, Jose Florez, Jose Trevino, and Raúl Valdez. Musicians such as Conjunto Aztlán also played there and the activist group the Brown Berets held meetings there.

After a three-year court battle ended in 1983, the University, at that time a community center, was demolished as activists, artists, and a young Roén looked on. Roén said that he was in mourning on that day of destruction. A place that had been so instrumental in his artistic, academic, and activist education was erased. In a quote from an interview with Roén in 2012, he describes how he felt as the building was destroyed along with the wonderful community environment and a sense of hope, meaning purpose and future:

> With a swing of that iron wrecking ball. In front of that gorgeous mural with the Quetzalcoatl Serpent and all of the beautiful imagery the wrecking ball just knocking it down was a moment of deep… it was a shocking moment. It was a shocking moment of where you've thought you have found the place, a place that will provide the future of opportunity right at that moment it can be demolished. You see it destroyed, taken away never to be seen again. And for me, going back to the whole idea of archive, you know, how with the swing of the wrecking ball erasure was part of the larger brush strokes of what was to come. And so now what we have is an Ihop. (Smith, 2012b)

Figure 12: *Los Elementos*. Mural by Raúl Valdez. Photo courtesy of Raúl Valdez.

Roén comments that after the destruction everyone went their own way and began working separately, but they remained active.

Activism

While Roén was gaining his informal art education on the East Side of Austin he attended St. Mary's Cathedral parochial school in central downtown Austin. Roén said that his formal education experience contrasted with the activism experienced in the barrio. Civil rights protests were frequent and the nuns would tell the students to "be very careful" as they watched from inside the fence of the schoolyard. However, the young "chavalio" Roén wanted to know what the people were marching for.

At the same time he and many of his classmates were participating in protests. The Chicano movement included a cultural arts arm, and the dancers from Aztlán would

participate in the marches and protests. Roén experienced firsthand the activism and increased social awareness of his community. He offered that such experiences were a significant cultural influence on him. While he and his fellow dancers engaged in zapateado they were surrounded by other well know activists, artists, and musicians.

Roén's dance bridged the gap, somewhat, between the East Side and his school and other areas of Austin. The school would ask them to dance there and at various schools. They were part of other cultural events as well. His mother would seek out new international opportunities for her students and one regular trip took them to Mexico City for summer courses or cursos de verano. During these classes they would work with local teachers to perfect their baile folklórico. During his youth, the group also traveled to England, Scotland, and Hong Kong to present their work. At sixteen, he directed his first show at the Paramount Theater in Austin.

Roén would continue his dance career in Mexico, as well as performing for the Academia de Danza Nacional, Instituto de las Bellas Artes, Departamento de tourismo, and various independent groups. He also spent time studying indigenous dance in Mexico to understand more about his cultural heritage. He blends this in his dance along with Chicanismo and modernity—all forms of dance and identity that make up his consciousness (Smith, 2012).

Figure 13: Roén with unidentified dance partners. Courtesy of Roén Salinas.

Roén states that dance is an "organic effort that exists wherever I go." From his interview and his dances it is obvious to see that this is a natural ability for him. Even as a child, he would convince the other boys to dance. He was working even then to keep their traditions alive. He says that dance is "a vehicle, a vessel for ideas for imagination for desires." At one event called Aquafest in Austin, Aztlán performed at the Noche Mexicana, a night dedicated to Mexican culture. He recounts "the beauty of the time" and describes the "thirst" in the eye of the audience more than just "consumption at an entertainment level." He went on to say, "The eyes were filling the soul and the spirit with imaginations, of a community that could be imagined, that could be mobilized" (he now finds that "gaze is a little bit more empty").

Through his dance, Roén experienced the divide between the different populations living in Austin. Some residents of Austin would not even venture to the East Side out of fear. Yet for Roén, it was just his neighborhood. He recalls several civil rights marches where the children and women, himself included, would take the vanguard, calling out protest chants and traversing First Street to Congress Avenue and up to the Capitol. The women and children were followed by community members and activists. At thirteen (approximate age), Roén and the other protesters crossed under IH 35. He describes it as "entering into the unknown," where they were greeted by mounted police (Smith, 2012). The police would let the women and children pass, but the activists would be stopped and the march would freeze. In a different march, Roén recalls that a local activist, Paul Hernandez, was brought physically to the ground by police. This created instability and an incongruent message for the kids in the community. As the children were looking up to the adults as advocates for their rights, the police were working to disable them from continuing their activities.

Roén's education was grounded in community activism, the arts, and the complexities of living and creating in the barrio and going to school and performing in the mainstream. The knowledge I learned from our interviews enabled me to better understand his work as an adult. He combines his experiences within his dance.

LA AWARENESS

As seen in the previous section, Roén's political and social awareness started at a very young age. He participated in a meaningful way to the Chicano movement and

learned his performing arts along side accomplished and politically active academics, musicians, and visual and performing artists. Roén's awareness extends through two important avenues: place and dialogue. These two aspects also heightened my awareness of Austin as a dynamic, ever changing third landscape where cultures collide, coexist, and dialogue occurs together.

Place

> **Roén:** We live in a modern world we are bombarded by images and sounds and smells…for me the barrio is a gorgeous place where you can just kind of experience so much just by walking two or three blocks… you can see a low-rider pass by with a cholo inside…or you can see a guy riding a bike with the low rider handle bars all the way up here.
> **Cassie** "or a bicycle, I've seen" (Laughter)
> **Roén**: "I'm sorry yeah, a bicycle, a bicycle. You know which one I'm talking about?" (Laughter)
> **Cassie:** "Up my street! There's a guy on a bicycle..." (Laughter)

During our interview, Roén shared a laugh about the uniqueness of our neighborhood in present day East Austin. Both he and I value the small-town feel and we laughed together over some of the more interesting neighborhood aesthetics. Here is another instance where Roén remarks on the various musical influences of the barrio from his dance studio door: "You hear everything from Norteño to Cumbia to hard rock and roll to you name it; it's blaring, hip hop you name it it's blaring…"

Austin as a unique place. Its aesthetics defines the culture that exists there as much as the culture influences the place, as stated by Lippard (1997): "Culture is usually understood to be what defines place and its meaning to people. But place equally defines

culture…. In addition, our concepts of place affect how we identify the living process within them" (p. 11). This relational process between culture and place is reciprocal. Roén was greatly influenced by Austin and chose to practice there despite having spent time performing around Texas and throughout the world. He explains this by contrasting Austin and Mexico City. During his summer courses there he witnessed art that served a different purpose, a commercial one, and "to perfect a technology" of the dance and the body.

On the other hand, Roén felt it was his job to "narrate stories" and to "think about expression in different ways." His work was not designed to be sold. Austin provided a "homegrown" city to present a work that matched the dialogues and transformations in the community. He said that Austin was the right fit for him, as the community was relatively small, progressive, and unlike other cities in Texas. Unlike some cities, Austin provides not only the drive for the traditional but also something modern. Austin enables his shows to come alive and to speak and exist throughout the community.

During another instance in our interview, Roén describes practicing for the Aztlán Underground Sacred Circle show. He steps out of the studio and could hear Selena booming from Rabbits, a local Tejano bar with over forty years of history in Austin (it has since changed hands) he could smell the food cooking from Dario's Mexican restaurant and he was aware of the temporality of culture and place, remarking that the "swath of culture that given time will be erased it won't exist anymore," and that "if it does exist will be very disconnected, disjointed." I realized upon listening to this interview again, this is why I am writing this thesis. The East Side and Mexican

American Arts community is disappearing, or rather, changing at an alarmingly fast pace. It is important to me to tell others about the world I enjoy so much and to preserve it, at least in words if not in reality.

This factor motivates Roén to create narrative through his dance that works to open up the issues of gentrification to a conversation for all the stakeholders:

> Right now there still is for me the barrio is a very dynamic place that speaks, you just need to listen. And so I kind of feel like my dance attempts to, to draw from that. To borrow those barrio aesthetics and to begin to, to frame them. Our audiences come from all different backgrounds. So my question now, lookin' at it from the choreographic lead of a dance company you know what are we narrating here. What do audiences walk away with? And I feel like they walk away with new ideas new impressions new perceptions of the diversity of our communities—one where I hope and I think that when they come all of a sudden they feel like by attending they were actually engaged in conversation. And by doing that they are halfway to understanding the translation. And, the other half is still to be discovered.

Dialogue

> I like this idea and this feeling of local organic speaking with each other rather than being speaked at and so that's the nature of my collaborative work and my engagement with art is to hold this conversation and it's an embodied conversation, you know.

The passage above shows how Roén uses dance to communicate important community issues and create a space for dialogue. He works to break down the borders created by the process of gentrification. In essence, he is shaping the dance to break down the "imagined" borders between the audience and the dance. Here Rivera-Servera and Young (2011) describe how borders are not always meant only for keeping people and ideas out, but rather entices the crossing and trading of ideas:

> The border exists inasmuch as it is (or has been) imagined as a construct with the capacity to prevent movement. It can me most effectively conceived as a site of tension between an impulse for stasis and a desire for controlled movement that polices the flow of the bodies and commodities that continuously push against it. A conceptualization of the border not only as a geographical setting but also as an active agent in the enabling of crossing and exchange invites a consideration of the ways in which it shapes the myriad performances that occur along its edges, the borderlands. (p. 2)

Roén's shows encourage audiences to think and to consider alternative points of view. Roén designs his work to "interact and interface" with the largest audience and to create a public "dialogue." The dialogue also speaks of the dancers' experiences themselves as well as his own consciousness. The work aims to:

> Narrate the multiple spheres of my identity, brining into the studio the multiple experiences of all the dancers into these wonderful embodied conversations that provide insights as it relates to what we all experience, feel, and think about culture.

Because of Aztlán's unique blend of the traditional with the modern Roén commented that, "People don't know what to expect," but they do know that it will be "multidimensional." He does not want to be literal in his dance presentation but asks the audience to think, "imagine the experience." He attempts to touch all members of the audience no matter their personal histories: "We've been able to narrate this idea of creating art that is translatable," so that it simultaneously speaks to mainstream audiences, through appreciation for the work and technique as well as for the local east Austinites who can see the traditional and feel at home. This requires an awareness of how to balance the audience, the dancers, and community issues. At the end of the day he says that he doesn't require "validation" from the audience for the work accomplished,

but rather hopes that they will leave thinking and that the true validation comes from the fact that everyone is in the same space and "continuing to dream together."

For Roén the dance, the dialogue, is all about "sharing love." His love for Austin and his community are expressed in his carefully choreographed shows. It reveals his awareness for his ever changing home.

LA TRANSCULTURATION

El Profe

I have had the opportunity to work with Roén as both an informal a formal educator. Roén is a doctoral student at The University of Texas at Austin, in the Department of Theatre and Dance. I also took a class from him called Mexican American Performance art. Knowing him in this way enabled me to see how he incorporates lessons on awareness and transculturation through performance studies.

He refers to academia as a constant state of translation, but he finds himself a "fluid border crosser" traversing a divide between the IH 35 community and that of the academic world. However, those around him on either side of the divide do not always understand his crossings. For example, Roén's colleagues in the program are not so fluid in their worlds that they have been able to identify with this work. When asked if they support his work he said that their histories don't recognize his historical position. Only one of his colleagues, who shares a Hispanic heritage, comes to his shows. None of the others have ever attended.

On the other side of the divide, the community from where Roén lives and works questions his academic pursuits. Roén says that going on to study and teach at the university has changed the way people view him in the community. Some want to know why he is pursing the PhD. Members question him saying: "Why are you leaving us?" Roén explains that he wants to acquire the tools to aid him in presenting and "narrating" the conversation. He wants to open the channels of academic knowledge to the community so they can be part of the conversation. He uses the popular saying "ni de aquí, ni de allá" (not from here or from there), and reverses to say "de allá y de aquí" (from here and from there), to indicate that he can exist in both worlds. He has become part of the academic community while also maintaining his identity and participation in the Mexican American community.

E. Patrick Johnson (2010), describing living in the "borderlands" of where he was raised and academia, details well this process of "negotiating" the worlds of academia with your place of growing up:

> I describe the process of trying to negotiate the politics of the academy on the one hand, and staying true to my roots/routes on the other. What I discover, however, is that none of theses spaces is wholly nurturing or wholly discouraging rather, they are liminal spaces that require agents within them to simultaneously conform to and transgress the temporal boundaries and borders that enclose them and the politics that emerge therein. It is within this vortex of identity politics, which can be emotionally, psychologically, professionally, and culturally frustrating. By recounting my own performance of identity at the borderlands, I speak to the instability of terms like "intellectual" and "community," the tenuous border between the front porch and the podium. (p.147)

Roén is an edgewalker, traversing the "tenuous border" between community and academia. He uses his life as a model for others, including myself. He utilizes this

transculturation, and awareness thereof, to ask his students what they want to do with their education. Seeing him working in both worlds effectively and staying true to himself encourages me and inspires me to do the same. This becomes one of the motivations for me to write this thesis, because what I learn at the university rarely makes it to the barrio, and lessons from the barrio are infrequent visitors to the university.

La Dance

Roén also expresses the complexity and beauty of transculturation through dance. Roén says that his creative flow is natural, including the fusing of music, linguistics, and art forms from a multicultural identity and environment. This enables him to combine luchadores with cumbia, while using a retro futuristic silver cowboy dancing to Michael Jackson's *Billy Jean*. Somehow he makes it work, and does it well. He explains here the process of edgewalking and transculturation:

> I think it's the radical activism that's, you know, in my DNA. Soy Americano. Soy Mexicano. So I can value the full spectrum. So, I've spent my life absorbing as much as I could and can um and so yeah I think the naturality comes in that it's embodied. You know it exists in the body. And I think there are a lot of knowledges that exists in the body that the mind has yet even begun to register.

Roén says that the audience understands his work as it is translated through the body. He speaks of one show called *Jungle of the Jaguar*. In describing it he tells that one of the "cats" watching the show came up to him afterward and said, "Man when you did the jaguar where you know its like the music the dance the outfit its like my skin—I had chills, goose bumps." Roén responded saying "orale" that their was a hidden meaning that both the man and Roén understood. Such knowledge and understanding

cannot be found in a textbook. It includes notions of indigenousness and modernity; it is not taught but rather the community inherently knows it. Roén works to tap into this "information base" and "knowledge set" and desires to express it as often as he can. The hard part he claims is training the body. If they can take in the information and interpret it the body will "speak its own language."

He explains how institutional dances, and more formalized dancers cannot fully express this language yet. Instead its community based and ethnic dances that "reveal the slippages, the gaps and the omissions that institutional dance can't yet, that doesn't know how yet to write."

He and all the Aztlán dancers come with a long history before stepping onto the floor. These internalized, historical, and ethnic archives are part of cultural memory and affect how the dancers move and interpret the work:

> The body in embodied cultural memory is specific, pivotal, and subject to change. Why this insistence on the body? Because it is impossible to think about cultural memory and identity as disembodied. The bodies participating in the transmission of knowledge and memory are themselves a product of certain taxonomic, disciplinary, and mnemonic systems. Gender impacts how these bodies participate, as does ethnicity. The techniques of transmission vary from group to group. The mental frameworks—which include images, stories, and behaviors—constitute a specific archive and repertoire. (Taylor, 2003, p. 86)

Figure 14: *Holly Lucha*. Courtesy of Aztlán Dance Company.

Roén states that he cannot limit the dancers. As a community arts activist it is his duty to use the dancers' histories and resources and utilize that knowledge and experience in their work with passion, ability, and energy, all of which translates into an engaged audience.

His most recent work *LoteriaLandia* does this as it embraces a variety of characters, narratives, and forms of dance. The show tapped into a quotidian Mexican game of Lotería (bingo). He moves beyond the face value of the cards to tell the story of the Lotería Characters themselves. In the programs that are distributed before each show, Roén gives an in-depth lesson, providing background for what the audience will experience. In *Loterialandia* he provides the following description:

> Each character interprets, weaves, and interacts through short movement thematics the current social and cultural ecosystems that we today we live in. Following the gist of the loteria game, where outcomes are circumstantial,

loterialandia does not offer a linear narrative from which to follow, but rather invites audiences to be actively engaged with the performance characters as they dance in, around, and with each other-making the work fresh, innovative, and thought-provoking, our colorful collage of Xicano-inspired dance requires everyone's participation. (Loterialandia, 2013)

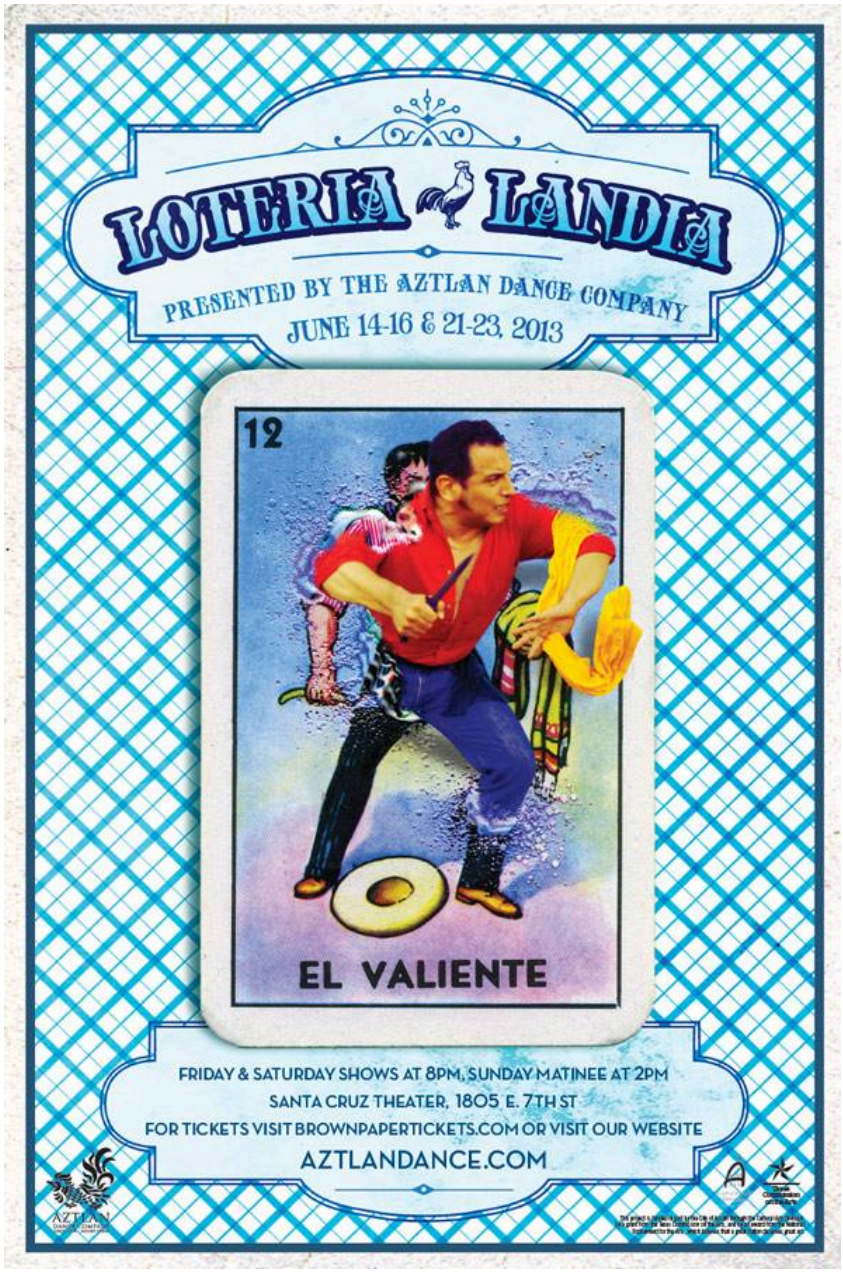

Figure 15: Program cover for *Loterialandia*. Courtesy of Aztlán Dance Company.

Roén remarks that his most rewarding experience is coming to dance three times a week. And while he says that "art is a privilege," he also comments that "it's also hellava lot of work." This work and attention to detail can be seen at every show. Watching his shows as an audience member, I can see the blending of identities and cultures though the work of the choreography, dancers, setting, and props. Aztlán is the dance troupe of the third landscape where numerous parts of my border consciousness are fulfilled.

LA CONCLUSION

We are all in it together

Roén says that collaborations "feed his soul." From the first of his dance lessons with Aztlán as a child to his current work there he has been part of many collaborations. He loves it. In his work in the barrio he acts as an "organizing agent," working to express ideas through movement and dancers who translate the work for the public. As a community they are "all in it together," something that he learned from the Chicano movement. Working with community is a collaboration between himself, the dancers, and the audience members. He says that people are the most important agent in academics and performing:

> I always say that theory follows people. And what I mean by that is art always happens. It's from the people, of the people, by the people for the people. And it is usually post facto that the academics begin to write about the work.

Roén wants to take the work to other communities so they can "live in our space." He also wants to incorporate new communities in the dialogue, including emergent communities that will result should the immigration system be revised. Here he speaks to the future of performance and his work:

> This idea of being 'perceived as' and also being 'part of' is always quite challenging…we as a community continue working with each other, attending performances, especially performances, because performances are these hyper utopian spaces and places, spaces that turn into places.
>
> As we continue promoting the arts I think you know the arts are a wonderful space for collective community healing and I think as we look at the atmosphere where things are at and as things change, I think the arts, especially arts that narrate a conversation are gong to become much more vital and important and I really do hope that the idea of collaboration with audiences and with other arts groups within different art forms continues expanding.
>
> I think it's almost, going back full circle, to the way we opened the conversation, going back to this idea that of all of us together creating nurturing generating supporting will be another beautiful space and for me that is going to be a magical space because we are going to start imagining different things and I hope to be part of this conversation.

From my curiosity and knowledge collecting about Roén Salinas and his work, combined with the explanation of how this information led to awareness and ultimately transculturation, this chapter has described how Roén became an edgewalker and an informal art educator. From a young age Roén traversed various worlds in his personal, academic, and performance areas of life. He is both Mexican and American and he demonstrates this in the narrative of this work and activism in the community. He thrives in both academic and community worlds and can move between them without losing his own personal identity. He also uses this border crossing as an opportunity to connect with others, especially through his shows with the Aztlán Dance Company. The informal

art education I obtained from Roén was public and easily accessible once I started to move between worlds. My education has been facilitated by his willingness to share his experiences with his audiences and me. In all of Roén's work, both academic and on the stage, there is a dialogue between the work and the viewer. I always left the shows or our conversations with a greater sense of how we can use our work to connect with others.

Chapter 7: El Graphic Designer

LA INTRODUCTION

How shall I begin my story that has no beginning? My name is Esperanza, Esperanza Quintero. I am a miner's wife. This is our home. The house is not ours. But the flowers... the flowers are ours. This is my village. When I was a child, it was called San Marcos. The Anglos changed the name to Zinc Town. Zinc Town, New Mexico, U.S.A. Our roots go deep in this place, deeper than the pines, deeper than the mine shaft. In these arroyos my great grandfather raised cattle before the Anglos ever came. The land where the mine stands - that was owned by my husband's own grandfather. Now it belongs to the company. Eighteen years my husband has given to that mine. Living half his life with dynamite and darkness. Who can say where it began, my story? I do not know. But this day I remember as the beginning of an end. It was my Saint's Day. I was thirty-five years old. A day of celebration. And I was seven months gone with my third child. And on that day - I remember I had a wish... a thought so sinful..... a thought so evil that I prayed God to forgive me for it. I wished... I wished that my child would never be born. No. Not into this world. (Jarrico & Biberman, 1954)

The opening narration of *Salt of the Earth* finds Esperanza Quintero recalling her ties to a mining town in New Mexico and the fear she has of bringing another child into that world. Based on a true story, *Salt of the Earth* relates the struggle a Mexican American community faces as it fights for fair and safe working conditions in the mines. The movie was controversial and blacklisted throughout much of the United States soon after it was released in 1954 because its theme and creators were linked to communism.

Salt of the Earth was one of the movies introduced to me by my friend, Paul Del Bosque during our movie series. I had never heard of the movie, but Paul claimed that it was integral to my Chicano education. Paul has been an active informal art educator in my life in Austin for the past five and a half years. The following chapter outlines this process of discovery through the stages of curiosity, knowledge, awareness, and transculturation. I interviewed Paul at my home on October 27, 2012. The conversation

and statements by Paul and I in this chapter are from that day unless otherwise referenced.

LA CURIOSITY

I met Paul Del Bosque at the Mexican American Cultural Center shortly after its Grand Opening in 2007. He was working as a gallery assistant and I was eager to learn more about the Center and its work. I was curious about Paul from the beginning, as I found out that he was a graphic designer who also was studying in the Mexican American Studies program at The University of Texas. We became fast friends because of our common interests.

I began to take note of Paul's graphic design work. His style was innovative and uniquely representative of multiple cultures within one idea. This was especially evident in his 2009 advertisement for the Día de los Muertos event. The work featured a calavera with an elaborate headdress of agave feathers and marigolds adorned with low-riders, guitars, and accordions. The skull also sported a pachuco bandana around its head, giving it an extra bit of style. (Paul would later mention that the advertisement was a homage to Austin artists Carlos Piñeda. Paul included Piñeda's famous saying "Que empiece la fiesta," and his signature red bandana to the image to honor the artists who passed away earlier that year.)

Figure 16: Advertisement for Día de Los Muertos, 2009. Created by Paul Del Bosque for the Mexican American Cultural Center.

There was something for everyone in the design. The traditional calavera and marigolds were featured, which are part of Day of the Dead culture in Mexico. The agaves represented the south and southwestern landscape. The low-riders and bandana

marked the work for pachucos and the accordion reminded one of Tejano, Conjunto and Norteño cultures. Paul's ability to capture so much in one small design spoke to not only to his innovativeness but his ability to traverse multiple worlds as an edgewalker and inspired me to know more of his work and how his style came to be.

EL KNOWLEDGE

There are so many dreams to be fulfilled, but Ultima says a man's destiny must unfold itself like a flower, with only the sun and the earth and water making it blossom, and no one else meddling in it. (Anaya, 1972, p. 223)

Beginnings

Paul del Bosque was born and raised on the hot and humid Gulf coast city of Corpus Christi, Texas. Paul loved growing up there, as it was a small city where you knew your neighbors. But, it was also a community big enough to keep your interest. The city is predominantly Mexican American with Tejano cultural traditions.

Paul and his two sisters had a stable life growing up with his family even though his parents divorced when he was nine. While his parents had shared custody, Paul mainly grew up surrounded by women who were a great influence in his life, including his mother and grandmother. Paul's ancestry is diverse. His father's side is a mixture of German, Irish, and Oklahoma Cherokee. (He does not know much about this side of the family as they are scattered across the United States). His mother's family is from Northern Mexico.

Paul has always been interested in art, with a natural talent his father's family and his sister also shared. He liked to draw and, even when he was very young, Paul would

include details in his work that other children left out. By age six or seven he was asking his sister to teach him how to shade and blend his drawings Paul says his art and talent were facilitated by his mother, who always made art and art materials available to him.

Low Riders and Gang Signs

When Paul entered elementary school he was creating objects much like a typical child in the United States, using "tempera paint and popsicle sticks." However, the 7th grade became a pivotal time for Paul. At that time he started drawing low-rider cars at school. The "cool kids" liked what he was doing and asked Paul to create illustrations of their gang symbols. He loved creating typography and created his own lettering styles modeled after commercial designs he saw around him.

Paul's love for hip-hop culture and low-riders came from his cousin Mario who was part of the hip hop culture and was "super cool." Mario wore baggy pants and had slicked back hair. Paul wanted to be like him. Thus, Paul developed his interest in low-riders. This was a jumping off point for Paul to learn about Chicanidad. At home, his Mexican heritage was never celebrated, unlike in Mario's family. Mario's father was a politically active Chicano and this was reflected in Mario's style and interests. This desire to learn more about his roots became the foundation for Paul's quest for his own identity and for establishing his design career.

Figure 17: Paul (left), in the 7th grade (1994) with his cousin Mario Flores (middle) and René Flores (right). Courtesy of Paul Del Bosque.

Professional Development

In the 7th grade Paul was also required to take a career class. He decided to shadow his brother-in-law, a graphic designer who designed packaging materials and instructional pamphlets. His brother-in-law had gone to the Art Institute in Houston and found a career in the technical side of design. Though Paul was more taken by the organic and creative side of the profession, he started thinking that graphic design was a career option.

In high school Paul was very active and became a member in many organizations including the mock trial team of the National Hispanic Institute, and the Hispanic

Leadership Opportunity Program—part of the League of United Latin American Citizens. He was captain of the cross-country team, participated in boy scouts, and was a part of the Nueces County delegation at the Texas Democratic Convention. All the while Paul was creating art and getting good grades. The organizations he participated in outside of school helped him become aware of politics and socioeconomic inequities.

His high school had one of the few Advertising Design programs in the state. The program housed a large studio space and ample equipment. His design teacher was an "old school production artist" for HEB who had created everything from coupons to huge masonite tomatoes plastered to the side of the grocery store. During this time, Paul started working with imagery from Chicano lore, including pyramids, zoot suits, accordions, and cowboy hats. One of his works was a close up, detailed, and exaggerated portrait of civil rights activist Cesar Chavez. Paul was also still reading low-rider magazines and copying much of what he saw. He didn't really know other Chicano artists and Corpus Christi did not host a lot of Chicano public art except for the murals of Tejano legend Selena. However, Paul found ways to learn more and get new ideas.

Paul went on to graphic design school as an undergraduate student at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in 2000. Paul experienced a great deal of culture shock when he left Texas for the east coast. Baltimore was an old and "rough city," but Paul grew to love the city as it spoke to his imagination with the dark, dreary, and underground seediness of an industrial blue collar community.

MICA provided a much different environment of safety and creativity. While the program offered the skills and tools for a career in the arts, Paul says that it was too

"touchy feely" and that the students had too much freedom. For example, a student could turn in projects instead of completing a research paper. The program promoted "concept over function," and left out teaching technical and practical business skills.

Paul made good friends on campus and began to feel more comfortable with himself. He could be himself and Mexican American and no one really questioned it. He got more in touch with his Texas roots while attending MICA, and his was another story to tell amongst his friends' diverse cultural heritages from around the world. Paul stayed active experiencing the city despite a full workload from his college classes.

At MICA Paul had no Chicano or Latino teachers. However, one of his mentors was an Anglo, a literature teacher who had been a war correspondent and free-lance photographer during the Central American wars. The professor helped Paul by making him feel that his art was "important" and "interesting." While Paul did not use his cultural history much as a subject at MICA, he did complete some special projects that focused on Tejano and Chicano culture, including a BBQ recipe book and a piece for a Latin American film festival.

After graduating from MICA, Paul had a myriad of jobs including a couple of design gigs, a racetrack test driver, and a resident assistant at the Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts. Finally, he answered one advertisement on Craigslist for a toy company that produced the famous Homies toys. Paul enjoyed this job very much where he helped produce work for movies, cartoons, and toy lines. It was at this time that Paul started thinking about how Chicano identity is projected through media.

These musings helped Paul to decide that he would like to study design and identity in an academic way. He applied to graduate school. Paul moved to Austin and began a master's degree in Mexican American Studies at The University of Texas. Paul's motive for going to graduate school was to combine design and aesthetics with Chicano identity. Paul directed all his research toward the study of design-oriented themes, including the rise of paper and printing industry in Mexico and the graphic design of the Chicano Movement (including Austin's Economy Furniture Strike). He even studied Chicano toys and cartoons and Tejano CD covers. Paul focused his thesis on Tex Mex restaurant design and how Mexican American culture is described through this form of iconography.

Austin's alternative environment drew Paul to live, study, and work there. He had always wanted to live in Austin, feeling like it was "a wondrous eccentric place" with "weird people walking around." He says that he is mystically linked to Texas:

> I am spiritually tied to Texas. It's my Aztlán. It's my paradise. It's my promise land. I feel at home here. I don't belong anywhere else. The reason being is that cause I'm not Mexican enough and I'm not American. I'm stuck in the middle somewhere between those two countries and that's Texas for me. It's the only place where I feel like I really belong. Everywhere else I'm just an outsider. I'm a weird stranger, you know? I've never felt American or that I was part of the United States…I'm Texan first.

Mythical Austin was a landscape where art, music, and academia merged—an eccentric place from his childhood. In Austin, as an adult, he could use his design background and aesthetic as he wanted.

When Paul decided to move to Austin he did not consider the Chicano community he would find there. However, the community would become an important part of both

his design and personal life. He took on a part time job at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center working in the main gallery. At the MACC, Paul enjoyed seeing the link between the Center, his academic world, and the community art world.

After volunteering to create the graphics for one of the first shows there he made the natural transition to graphic designer for the Center. Paul says that he "carved out a job" for himself. His graphics for MACC events spanned gallery openings to musical events and classes and embodied Paul's Tejano and Chicano aesthetic. Paul continues to work for the MACC on an on-call basis, though his full-time job designing for Capital Metro and the design business he co-founded, Codebreaker Creative, keeps him very busy.

Paul's life was a series of fortunate circumstances that birthed a creative space for the designer to explore his identity through art. These investigations include explorations of his cultural heritage, his natural ability for design, influential mentors, and the support of great high school and college design programs. These elements all converged in Austin where he was able to support himself creating design work that was authentic to his identity.

LA AWARENESS

Paul's childhood and studies helped open up a world of awareness for him, not only about Chicano identity but also socio economic and class separations. This

awareness and the moments outlined below helped to create his design and political leanings.

Self to Family Awareness

There were moments of political awareness in Paul's family. These included his mother's march with the United Farm Workers and his great-grandmother's involvement in the GI Forum. However, Paul's grandparents did not take great pride in their Mexican heritage. Paul's mom was taught to be ashamed of her heritage by the public school system, where she and others were punished for speaking Spanish. She decided not to teach her own children Spanish because of the discrimination she faced at school growing up. Although Paul's mom never put down her heritage, she did not "celebrate it" as Paul was growing up.

Similar to other Mexican American youth who wanted to learn more of what was not taught to them, Paul learned about his Mexican and Chicano history though his own research and experiences. Watching Paul move through this process helped his mother to "rediscover her pride." Paul and his mom would explore together and learn (and relearn) their own heritage while assuming their identities within it. Paul's mom even went on to complete her Ph.D. at The University of Texas where she researched the influence of culture on students' early childhood education. She included in her study how neighborhood education could provide a different education than what was received through formal schooling. Paul believes that she took on this topic because of seeing his struggle to discover his personal heritage and identity:

> Her desire to explore that topic actually had a lot to do with watching me explore my own cultural heritage and wanting to really understand who I was in the midst of, really, an identity crisis that I went through during this time of being a little Chicano, thug, low-rider kid.

Paul's exploration of cultural identity continued though his undergraduate years at MICA. He was elected by his fellow students to give the undergraduate commencement address at graduation where his family came to see him, proudly waving tiny Texas flags. Paul was the first Mexican American student to give the graduation speech in the school's history, since it opened in 1826. For Paul, it was one of the proudest moments of his life. Paul calls it a "self righteous speech with a lot of fist pounding," where he talked about what it was like living in Maryland. He described times walking to school in the cold and singing Canción Mixteca, a traditional Mexican song about being away from one's native land, used in the Chicano movement to tell of migrant workers who had left their homes in Mexico to travel north for work in the United States. Here he describes those times, saying that the song was:

> A lament to the Mexican American migrant worker who would migrate north to Michigan, to Chicago, for work, to work in the fields, or the factories. I used to sing that song to myself walking down the street because, in a way, I felt like I was part of that legacy of Chicanos who left home to go north to work I was doing a different kind of work. I was doing the kind of work that their generation struggled for so that now I could go north for college, not to work in a field.

Canción Mixteca
Jose Lopez Alvarez

Que lejos estoy del suelo donde he nacido.
Y al verme tan solo y triste Cual hoja el viento.
Quisiera llorar, Quisiera morir De sentimiento.
Oh! tierra del sol. Suspiro por verte.
Ahora que lejos Yo vivo sin luz.Sin amor.
Y al verme Tan solo y triste Cual hoja el viento
Quisiera llorar,Quisiera morir De sentimiento.
Inmensa nostalgia Invade mi pensamiento.

How far I am from the land where I was born!
Immense nostalgia invades my thoughts;
And seeing myself so lonely and sad like a leaf in the wind,
I want to cry, I want to die from this feeling.
Oh Land of the Sun! I yearn to see you!
Now that I'm so far from you, I live without light and love;
And seeing myself so lonely and sad like a leaf in the wind,
I want to cry, I want to die from this feeling.

Paul's family was very proud of him, including his Grandmother who had never promoted her Mexican heritage. Paul was overwhelmed in seeing his family's response. Paul had used his own awareness to affect those around him and in turn increased their awareness of the world around them.

LA TRANSCULTURATION

From his childhood in Corpus Christi to his academic endeavors at MICA and The University of Texas, as well as in his work with the MACC and Capital Metro, Paul seeks out new worlds and engaging ideas that challenge accepted points of view. His curiosity and creativity also construct bridges to new forms of expression through dance and theatre. These modes of expression facilitate transculturation through coming into contact with new audiences and shared experience to create a new "cultural present," as explained by Gloria Anzuldúa (1993):

> We, the viewers in the present, walk around and around the glass—boxed past. I wonder who I used to be, I wonder who I am. The border artist constantly reinvents her/himself. Through art s/he is able to re-read, reinterpret, re-envision and reconstruct her/his culture's present as well as its past. This capacity to reconstruct meaning and culture privileges the artist. As a cultural icon for her/his ethnic community, s/he is highly visible. (p.112)

The following section describes how Paul is constantly 'reinterpreting, re-envisioning and reconstructing himself through his art.

Accessible Art

At MICA, professors taught Paul new ideas about the transmission of art, including the importance of accessibly of art to the public. This influenced Paul to move beyond being a gallery artist:

> The reason that I never wanted to be a gallery artist was because I just didn't want to be dependent on rich people to survive, to eat. But being a graphic designer, I saw that as like an art from that is accessible to everybody. And if done well, it could be just as fine as an art as a painting or a sculpture.

As a graphic designer, Paul's work reaches more people than if his art was simply in a gallery here or an exhibit there. One of the most visible and accessible venues for Paul's art may be the MACC. Paul has created advertising material pamphlets, cards, and posters that have been email-blasted, handed out, and hung from the sides of the walls at the Center, which is visited by thousands of people from throughout Austin and the world. The current and previous directors of the MACC have given him abundant freedom to create, using his graphic translation of cultural notions in his work.

Paul wants his work to be "authentic and thought out" and have a historical foundation. Paul uses his academic education to help support this goal. He is an edgewalker crossing through his academic, artistic, and working worlds to create material for the community. He focuses on the mission of the MACC, as the most important consideration for creating visuals to promote events and classes.

Paul also works with other organizations to do the same for their events. As part of the Codebreaker Creative, LLC, a design collective he helped found with his childhood friends, he helps groups add depth and creativity to design, color scheme,

typography, and “evoke a nostalgic familiarity” while using his technical skills to ensure the work looks professional.

Figure 18: Paul del Bosque’s poster for the Diez y Seis Independence Day Festival.

Paul has been fortunate in finding a space for his work. His Chicano aesthetic coupled with his technical and creative genius has served him well within the Latino

community in Austin where his work has been well received. Paul speaks to staying true to his art: "I just do it the way I want to do it and they like it, fortunately." This correlates directly with Krebs (1999) description of edgewalkers: "An edgewalker maintains continuity wherever he or she goes, walking the edge between two cultures in the same persona" (p. 9). "They stay true to who they are, to their cultures of origin, *and* become part of mainstream culture" (p. 9).

In Austin, Paul has become part a network of arts and Latino organizations that exist in the same landscape that Paul depicts with his designs. Paul realizes how great this is, saying:

> I'm the happiest I've ever been in my life because I'm doing exactly 100% what I've always wanted to do and I've exactly the kind of artist that I've always wanted to be and what makes me really proud of myself is to know that if twelve year old Paul could look right now, and see what I was doing, he would be so happy. He could not wait to grow up. And so that makes me feel good.
>
> I've been incredibly lucky during the course of my career doing the kind of work that I've done.

Paul's work continues in themes similar to those found in his work when he was growing up, including low-riders and themes embracing Chicanidad:

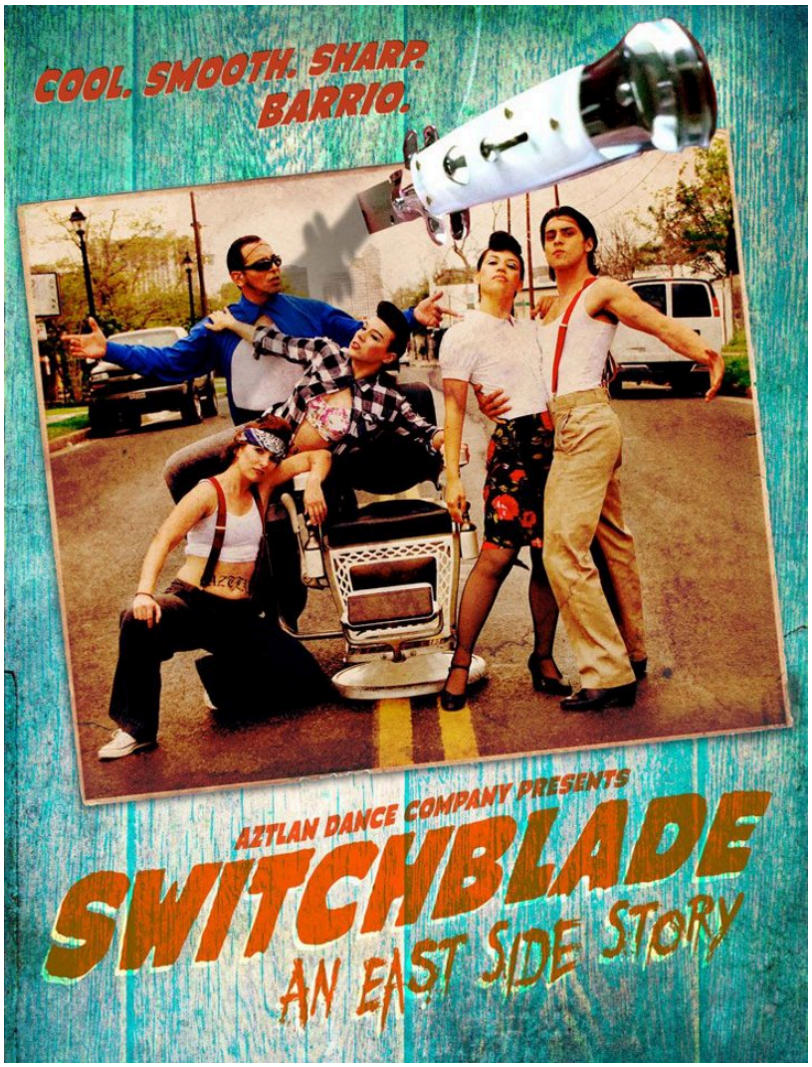

Figure 19: Advertisement for Aztlán Dance Company's *Switchblade* performance. Courtesy of Aztlán Dance Company. Created by Paul Del Bosque.

Figure 20: Paul Del Bosque's entry Guadalupe Cultural Arts Conjunto Festival 2012 poster contest.

Figure 21: *Chicano Optimism*. Paul del Bosque's print for the Serie Project.

Paul's work has transcended his principal art form of graphic design. In his collaborations with Aztlán Dance Company, Paul not only creates their marketing material but also performs in their shows. Paul works well with the team and with the Vision Director and Choreographer, Roén Salinas. In relation to the design work, Paul

says that it is beneficial and fruitful that Roén trusts him and lets him do what he wants with the advertising.

Being a dancer was strange to Paul at first. He never thought of performing but was brave enough to cross the artistic borders to new forms of art. With Aztlán he has played a myriad of "quirky characters," including an "intergalactic Norteño" and Mexican cinema legend Cantinflas. Paul respects the team just as Roén trusts him to be true to the nature of the show in his design work. With Aztlán, Paul found a family and "another home."

Paul has many more artistic borders to cross. He would like to work on designs for Pachanga Fest, a Latino music festival and with the local theatre company Teatro Vivo. He also wants to create a graphic novel, a film, a restaurant menu, and work on a political campaign. Living and working in Austin, Paul says that it is hard to separate work and art. In the social landscape he has created artist events such as a Drink and Draw where he invites friends to come and do live model drawing in the Santa Cruz Cultural Center.

Paul Woods

Moving between cultural and artistic worlds was not always easy for Paul. There are moments when an edgewalker feels the stress of shifting across borders. Moving between Tejano, Chicano, Mexican, and Anglo cultures are just a few of the borders he crosses on a daily basis. As Krebs (1999) points out, this choosing and standing on the edge is not always easy: "Most of us have a tendency to reduce this uncomfortable state

by jumping one way or the other. Staying in the middle, looking at both sides, picking and choosing from each, challenges even the most stalwart social reformer. (p. xii).

Growing up in Corpus Christi, Paul was Tejano and the community "treated me like any other Mezcan kid" for the most part. It didn't matter that he didn't speak Spanish because many of his friends did not speak the language either, being of the same generation of children whose parents had been punished for this in their own youth. In middle school, Paul wanted to fit in but it was hard being bi-racial and looking Mexican but having an Anglo name. He did wonder about his white heritage but his father's family lived far away and the Corpus Christi community was largely Mexican American.

The hardest part of dealing with it was his last name. Paul hated his family name, saying that it was not him and that it "would confuse people" and it would confuse him. Kids made fun of him because of his name. Once he grew up he found another graphic designer using the same name and he decided to change his own, translating his last name, Woods, into Spanish—Del Bosque. In his own words: "I could take on a new identity and justify it by saying I had to differentiate myself from another graphic designer who's out there working in the field." Paul said that making this decision felt like what he was "meant to do." He was meant to have a new identity separate from all the hardship he had faced: "I could chart my own course in a way and leave that struggle in the past."

Paul admits that it is a seemingly nominal problem and that "it was a luxury to be able to think so much about myself." However, when Paul translated his last name, he "never felt more himself" and he found out who he was. I asked if his new name

indicated a new identity: "Was this you changing, or were you embracing who you already were?" Paul said simply that it was the "same name, different language." He affirmed that he loves his father and his father's family, but that the translated name represents him more clearly. He is more confident in himself and that it:

> Affects how I present myself, how I carry myself, how I make art, the way I talk about my art. Before, the subject matter of my work, coupled with that name—I was always having to justify it somehow or explain it.

Paul started using his new name in graduate school and went on to legally change it. I met Paul as he was transitioning from one name to another and at a time when I was also making a transition. I had been working to find this same confidence. I felt much like I was trapped in the saying—"Ni de aquí. Ni de allá" not from here nor from there. My name, my appearance doesn't seem to match with the preconceived notions mainstream culture has for me.

I was Cassie from Ohio but also Cassie who had lived and studied in Mexico, who had searched out new ideas in a Texas a graduate school. I started using the Casita symbol to sign my art as a compromise. It represented multiple parts of my identity: part Ohio, part Mexico, and part new landscape. One of the first times Paul and I met I was drawing my Casita and I explained it to him. It was comforting to know that he was going through a different but somewhat similar transition to find himself. In the end, we both decided for ourselves how we would be represented.

Paul and I are edgewalkers and it is not always easy to be in a alternative landscape as Krebs (1999) explains here: "In my mind, the word itself implies taking risk, existing on the edge, living between opposing forces, progressing forward and living

in two worlds" (p. xi). By telling others around us about our experiences, we help them through similar movements of transculturation.

LA CONCLUSION

Figure 22: Cassie Smith (left—The Praying Mantis) and Paul Del Bosque (middle left and unmasked) during the MACC's *Viva Lucha - Mask Making Mania!* class in October 2011 where Paul taught the history of Mexican luchadores.

Chang (2008) defines 'Mentors' "anyone-whether older or younger than you—from whom you have learned new knowledge, skills, principles, wisdom, or perspectives that have made an impact on your life" (p. 79). He goes on to say that:

> Cultural acquisition and transmission often take place between mentors and mentees because mentors intentionally or unintentionally invite mentees to share their knowledge, skills, and perspective from their cultural groups. With or without intention, mentors make durable impressions on mentees through their enduring relationships. (p. 79)

According to these definitions and descriptions of mentors, Paul has surely been this for me as seen in the process of transculturation by way of curiosity, knowledge collection, and awareness. His ability to traverse various cultural worlds was relevant to my experience and allowed us to build a relationship where we have learned from each other. Paul's work transcends all of his cultural identities and exists within a third landscape of coexisting worlds. These features and Paul's ability to identify with others from his own experiences classify him as an edgewalker.

Paul's work can be found in many places, from the sides of concrete walls to gallery exhibits and on the sides of busses and being danced out on the floor of the Santa Cruz Cultural Center. His work asks questions of culture and the viewer. As a viewer, I find myself walking away with questions for him and another conversation begins. Paul's work adds an important chapter in the edgewalker archive and has been one of my most influential informal art educators.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

"Then maybe I don't have to be just Marez, or Luna, perhaps I can be both— " I said.

"Ay, every generation, every man is part of his past. He cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials, make something new— "

"Take the llano and the river valley, the moon and the sea, God and the golden carp— and make something new," I said to myself. That is what Ultima meant by building strength from life. (Anaya, 1972, p. 247)

Introduction

Just like Antonio in Rodolfo Anaya's novel *Bless Me, Ultima*, each one of us is made up of various worlds. We do not have to choose between them but rather we can combine them to make something new. As seen in the previous chapters, our edgewalkers do just that. They have combined both Mexican and American heritage into something new—a third landscape where they have achieved transculturation, or taking on the attributes of various cultures.

Through their friendship and informal teaching I learned much about Chicano culture and identity. This process, as I have described in detail in the preceding pages, began with curiosity and interest in the Mexican American culture. This interest led me to seek out more knowledge about the subject. The knowledge I obtained helped to increase my awareness of my self and of others and, in most times, I discovered how individuals are more alike than we are different from each other. This cross cultural identification enabled me to feel at home within another culture and led to transculturation, or the exchange and addition of other cultures to one's own culture.

Findings

My primary research question for this thesis was how do artists become informal art educators through visual and performing arts? In these chapters I have demonstrated through my autoethnographic research in the Mexican American art community in Austin, Texas how I learned from four artists practicing in the city. I interviewed Briar Bonifacio, Claudia Zapata, Roén Salinas, and Paul Del Bosque. In doing so, I discovered how their art was a product of their life experiences. From their teachings I understand more about artistic techniques and the creative processes now. Each of them has their own forms of expression, including creating art from repurposed objects, curating exhibits, choreographing performances, and designing programs and posters.

My informal art education was facilitated by the thoughts and actions of these artists and the transcending of my own personal cultural background, leading to a new space. The parts of our identity—Mexican, American, and Austinite, along with many others, came together to generate art and experience within a shared space. Briar, Claudia, Roén, and Paul are edgewalkers in their own life, and this recognition enabled them to connect with me through their actions, words, and art.

As Ultima tells Antonio in *Bless me, Ultima*, "You are growing, and growth is change. Accept change, make it part of your strength" (Anaya, 1972, p. 245). Each of my collaborators understood that their changes and experiences beyond their own culture provided an opportunity for them to not lose their culture but rather to create one that was

new, stronger, and inclusive of multiple worlds. As an edgewalker myself, I didn't lose my culture through transculturation. I broadened, expanded, and added to it.

As I wrote this document I realized how much I had actually learned from each of my collaborators. Most of the resources in this work were suggestions from the edgewalkers of this thesis or others in the community that have supported me in the research. The process of writing the thesis was part of the transculturation process—I was curious so I tried to find more knowledge. This led me to becoming aware and finally to move beyond my own culture to identify with another at the same time.

Emergent Themes

Each of the artist's discussed in this thesis hail from different backgrounds. They work with a variety of media and have transcended their culture into various new worlds, thus becoming edgewalkers. Many of the same themes were recurrent amongst the four artists that I interviewed.

Theme 1: Mentors

One of the themes that emerged in this study was the value of mentors. Each one of the collaborators had people in their lives that encouraged them to pursue art. One of the primary mentors for each of them was their mother. They had mothers who made art, dance, design, camera, crayons, etc. available to them. This may be why all of the interviewee's adult work resembled elements from their past and who they were and what they did as children. Experiences and art subjects of their youth greatly informed who

they became and the work they produced later in life. For example, Briar was drawing the same pictures on rocks when he was three, that he is painting throughout Austin now. Claudia was a skater kid who grew up to create a zine, a form of media popular in skater crowds. Roén has been dancing since he could walk and continues that tradition today. Paul liked drawing low-riders and accordions as a kid and they are common subjects in his work at the present.

Theme 2: Work within the Community

Another noticeable theme I observed in my experiences with these artists was the overlapping of their work within the community and art and cultural centers and events in Austin. The artists are all part of a vibrant network and they collaborate together on projects and exhibits. Austin itself provided each of them an outlet for their work, whether it be in the rubble and public space for Briar to create his smiley faces, Mexic-Arte Museum for Claudia to put together innovative exhibits, the Santa Cruz Cultural Center for Roén and his third landscape productions, or in the various Latino organizations that Paul designs for. Each of them has an outlet for their work. Each of the collaborators is very active, academically, creatively, and in the community. All of them work to create new and innovative spaces for their work and to showcase their identity through their art.

Theme 3: Facing Difficult Encounters

The interviews with each of my collaborators enabled us to talk about difficult topics. Though we have seen how important edgewalking is, it can be at times very difficult to move between cultures. For example, Claudia spoke about the racism she had experienced in her life and especially in Austin, and Paul talked about feeling like he didn't belong because of his bicultural heritage. Especially poignant for me was Roén's discussion on Austin of the past and the realization that the world he knew is slipping away. This awareness and conscious demostrated by myself and my collaborators, while difficult at times, can become familiar and conducive spaces for learning, as seen here in the words of Gloria Anzuldúa (1987):

> However, there have been compensations for this *mestizo*, and certain joys. Living on borders an in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an "alien" element. There is exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, and in being "worked" on. I have the sense that certain "faculties"—not just in me but in every border resident, colored or non-colored—and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. Strange, huh? And yes, the "alien" element has become familiar—never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable but home. (Preface)

Motivations

One of my motivations was to create another resource for the Chicano Studies archive. I have done this by writing this thesis and doing oral history interviews, which will be archived at the Austin History Center for use by other researchers. I have also presented my research several times to a variety of audiences to publically address this subject and generate curiosity and awareness in others. Sharing my work also helps to

fulfill my second motivation: to generate discussion about the importance of informal art education. This value, as demonstrated in this thesis, is not only to learn more about art but also to identify and connect with those around us. This is the third goal of this thesis: to create awareness within the individual and the community about the power of shared experience that can be transmitted though art and informal art education.

A fourth motivation for conducting this work was revealed to me after I started writing this thesis. While listening to Roén's interview, I was taken by his description of the sights, sounds, and smells of the East Side of Austin and saying that this environment is almost lost. This touched me deeply because the world of my informal art education that was so important to me is rapidly changing. I desired to preserve this world through words and in the archive but also to generate discussion and awareness about the importance of a third landscape where people like Briar, Claudia, Roén, Paul and I can coexist.

Recommendations

Borders are meant to be crossed and as educators, both formal and informal, we must act as guides to help our students learn how to identify and connect with other cultures. These boundaries, as described by Lippard (1990), are not always easy to navigate and transcend:

> The boundaries being tested today by dialogue are not just "racial" and national. They are also those of gender and class, of value and belief systems, of religion and politics. The borderlands are porous, restless, often incoherent territory, virtual minefields of unknowns for both practitioners and theoreticians. Cross-cultural, cross-class, cross-gender relations are strained, to say the least, in a

> country that sometimes acknowledges its overt racism and sexism, but cannot confront the underlying xenophobia—fear of the other—that causes them. Participation in the cross-cultural process, from all sides, can be painful and exhilarating. I get impatient. A friend says: remember, change is a process, not an event. (p. 7)

Transculturation is a process as well, not an event. As described in the previous chapters, the process is ongoing and cyclical and happening everyday. As art educators, we can create intentional transculturative environments and experiences for our students in the classroom and in the community. By creating dialogue and providing knowledge and a safe space to explore our own identity and that of others, we can work toward more culturally responsive instruction or teaching through cultural experience. This will help students to understand themselves more fully, perhaps enabling them to recognize how they are edgewalkers, and how they can connect and identify with others.

These spaces are being created in Austin, whether it is on Sundays at the White Horse, or in Paul's graphic design, or on Roén's dance floor. People do not have to choose between one culture and another, the can exist in an alternative space where all parts of their identity are accepted. In this thesis I have attempted to create a similar landscape. By publishing this work and presenting it to others, I am creating spaces and invitations for others to enter the space, fulfill their curiosity with knowledge, and generate awareness to the point of transculturation.

Further Research

In this thesis I have described many of my experiences with transculturation within the Mexican American art community. I also described in-depth four of my

informal art educators. However, despite what I have described in these pages, so many other stories and informal art educators were part of my education. Further research could include a wider study of community artists and community based art education within the Mexican American community, as well as a comparison of that education with that of formal education. One might also compare edgewalking artists who work across different media styles such as music, writing, and performance. It would also be worthwhile to compare artists working in other Mexican American communities in the United States to see how they are creating a third landscape. Another investigation could also be conducted in other edgewalking communities such as in immigrant populations living in the United States.

Conclusion

Tom Finkelpearl (2001) interviewed a participant in the Young Mother's Program with Project Row Houses. Assata Shakur, describes how the project's founder, Rick Lowe, was essential to her going to college:

> You know, this is one thing that I wanted to mention, and I told Rick this. One day we were talking about school, and when I said, "I am your art." I am really here in graduate school at Penn State because Rick created Project Row Houses. It is not that I wouldn't be successful otherwise, but it was something that was necessary for me to move myself further in my life. And without them at the time, the journey could not have been possible. Almost definitely. You know, he invested; he saw; he created; he put these ideas into being, and this is the result of this ideas and his creativity. We are his living art forms, which function throughout life. When I was able to see it like that, then that's when I thought that art was a beautiful thing. It wasn't something that you could just hang on the wall. It could be that, but it could me manifested in so many ways.

In many ways I am a "living art form" made up of all the lessons from my informal art educators. I am their "art" created through their own media and our shared experiences through transculturation. As Roén pointed out, "We are all in it together." As a community it is integral that we learn from and about each other so that we are able to build a more accepting space to live in without choosing one culture over another. As Roén also stated, "De aquí y de allá"—from here and from there.

In the third landscape, I have learned how to embrace the many parts of my identity and to celebrate it. I am Cassie from Ohio. I am La Casita who enjoys learning about Mexican and Mexican American culture. I am a bike riding, Refugee Employment Specialist and consummate volunteer. I am an edgewalker and hope to be an example for others who traverse various worlds searching for their own identity. Now it is time for the next film in My Chicano Education, *American Me*. My informal art education continues…

Appendix: Interview Questions

Biographic Information

1. Where did you grow up?
2. What was your family life like?
3. What is your cultural heritage?
4. How did this influence your childhood/adolescence?

Art Education

5. How were you first exposed to art?
6. Please recount your experiences with Art Education?
7. What experiences were the most influential? How were they influential?
8. Who were the people i.e. artists or teachers who were the most influential in your life?
9. How are you currently engaging in art programs or production?
10. How would you like to engage in art in the future?
11. How has your art influenced your work?

Austin

12. How did you find your way to Austin?
13. Why did you decide to stay and practice art in Austin?
14. What factors about Austin make it a good place for art?
15. How do you feel you can express your identity through art in Austin?
16. What factors about Austin makes it a good place for Mexican American art?
17. Please describe your experiences with the reception of your art/art programs with the Austin audience?

Identity/Space

18. How do you think Mexican American identity is reflected or not in the Austin community as a whole?
19. What aspects/spaces in Austin have influenced you and your art?
20. How do you collaborate with/are inspired by other Artists in Austin?
21. How do you think the Austin community supports Mexican American art and culture?

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Vita

Cassie Smith was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia on October 31, 1980 to her parents Roderick Gordon Smith and Sherry Lynn Smith. She, along with her brother Isaac John Smith, grew up in Cutler, Ohio. Cassie graduated from Warren High School in Vincent, Ohio in 1999. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in both Spanish and International Studies from Ohio University along with a minor in French. Cassie holds a Master of Arts degree in Latin American Studies from the University of Texas as well as a Certificate in Nonprofit Studies from the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Services. Cassie has been a member of Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center Advisory Board since 2011 and a volunteer at the Center since 2007. Cassie has also been an active volunteer with The Long Center for the Performing Arts and the Austin History Center. Cassie works full-time as a Refugee Employment Specialist at Caritas of Austin. As an artist, Cassie creates multipurpose collage art from found objects.

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This thesis was typed by Cassie Lynn Smith.